Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development
GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Bryozoa
Fact sheet

This diverse and often very beautiful group of animals includes bryozoans, lace corals and moss animals. They take on a variety of shapes – they can have flat, encrusting, plant-like or coral-like formations, and are therefore often mistaken for corals or algae.

Bryozoans are colonial animals meaning that what looks like one individual is actually a group of individuals known as zooids that are 1mm or smaller in size. Many zooids have a hard box-like wall (or cup) made of calcium carbonate, which forms a hard skeleton. However, some are also soft and flexible and have little or no calcification.

The many marine species of bryozoans are found attached to a hard substrate such as a reef, but they may also live on marine plants. They are sessile (unable to move) so they use their tentacles to collect food. They also produce a distasteful and often toxic chemical to deter predators.

Bryozoans are divided into three groups (classes):

Stenolaemata

This is an ancient and primitive group, with most known species being fossils. Only ten per cent of animals in this group are extant (in existence) although more than 600 species are still alive today. They live on the ocean floor and form colonies with calcified exoskeletons. This makes them good candidates for fossil preservation.

Gymnolaemata

These bryozoans are almost entirely marine species. They grow on the surfaces of rocks, seaweed and sometimes on animals.

Phylactolaemata

These are restricted to freshwater species. Unlike many marine bryozoans, phylactolaemate colonies consist of only one type of zooid.

Commonly seen washed up on beaches is the Gymnolaemata bryozoa misleadingly known as "lace coral", *Celleporaria cristata*. They usually attach to structures as seen (far right) attached to wireweed.

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