

The Inaugural Sydney Sea Slug Census

7th November 2015

Congratulations one and all for a fantastic Inaugural Sydney Sea Slug Census. We were exceptionally fortunate with the weather - those diving Bare Island experienced good conditions from early in the morning until early afternoon. A total of 31 divers registered for the event with 20 participants submitting photos by the due date. The abundance of sea slugs in the sponge habitats was quite high, and a range of additional species were found in the shallow, kelp-dominated habitats on the western side of Bare Island.

And now to the results you've all been waiting for ...

BEST NUDI SPOTTERS* (with the highest count on the day) - a tie!! Will Owyong & Cath Shorthouse, John Turnbull & Yolana Kailichova – both with 18 species. Ian Shaw and Bob Edgar came a very close second with 17 species.

BEST PHOTO – There were some excellent entries and 10 were shortlisted. In the end, the panel chose Ian Shaw's image of *Goniobranchus tasmaniensis* as the winner because of its visual impact (see below).

Together, we found a total of 43 species of sea slug plus one species of bubble shell (*Bullina lineata*) – not a bad effort at all for the first event of what we hope will be a regular fixture in the Sydney diving calendar.

To help hone those identification skills, and to alert you all to some of the species you may have overlooked in the past, I have selected an image of each species found and provided the number of dive teams that found it (out of a total of 10). The initials of the dive team that took the image are shown in brackets (key at the bottom of this page).



Ian Shaw's winning image of *Goniobranchus tasmaniensis* – taken with an Olympus TG4

Teams: D & C – Duncan Heuer/Charli Elliott; D & J – Denise Lawler/John Velarde; I & B – Ian Shaw/Bob Edgar; J & B – Jacqui Ashby/Bob Milne; J & Y – John Turnbull/Yolana Kailichova ; J & A – John Webster/Ash Grewar; KD – Kim Dinh; KO – Kris O'Keefe; S & M – Steve Smith/Matt Nimbs; W & C – Will Owyong/Cath Shorthouse.

* Matt Nimbs and Steve Smith found 23 species but are ineligible for the competition.



Goniobranchus splendidus (W&C)
(10 sightings)



Goniobranchus hunterae (D&C)
(10 sightings)



Dorisprismatica atromarginata (D&J)
(10 sightings)



Doris chrysothorax (D&C)
(9 sightings)



Hypselodoris bennetti (J&B)
(9 sightings)



Pteraeolidia ianthina (KO)
(8 sightings)



Ceratosoma amoenum (J&B)
(8 sightings)



Goniobranchus loringi (I&B)
(6 sightings)



Diversidoris sulphurea (J&Y)
(5 sightings)



Goniobranchus thompsoni (J&Y)
(5 sightings)



Jorunna sp. 2 (J&B)
(5 sightings)



Aphelodoris varia (I&B)
(4 sightings)



Elysia sp. 1 (J&B)
(4 sightings)



Glossodoris angasi (J&B)
(4 sightings)



Gymnodoris alba (W&C)
(3 sightings)



Hypselodoris sp. 2* (W&C)
(3 sightings)



Okenia atkinsonorum (I&B)
(3 sightings)



Phyllidiella pustulosa (D&J)
(3 sightings)



Bullina lineata (S&M)
(2 sightings – not counted in the tally)



Cratena lineata (S&M)
(2 sightings)



Goniobranchus tasmaniensis (I&B)
(2 sightings)



Pleurobranchus peronii (S&M)
(2 sightings)



Paliolla cooki (W&C)
(2 sightings)



Baeolidia australis (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Berthellina citrina (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Ceratosoma brevicaudatum (J&Y)
(1 sighting)



Dendrodoris krusensternii (D&C)
(1 sighting)



Discodorid sp. (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Elysia maoria (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Elysia tomentosa (W&C)
(1 sighting)

* On advice from Dr Richard Willan, we are separating this from *H. obscura* for now



Eubranchus sp. (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Goniobranchus albonares (W&C)
(1 sighting)



Goniodoris sp. (I&B)
(1 sighting)



Austraolis ornata (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Hallaxa michaeli (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Hypselodoris obscura (J&Y)
(1 sighting)



Janolus sp. 1 (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Limacia ornata (KD)*
(1 sighting)



Noumea haliclona (D&C)
(1 sighting)



Pleurobranchaea maculata (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Plocamopherus imperialis (S&M)
(1 sighting)



Tambja tenuilineata (I&B)
(1 sighting)



Trapania brunnea (I&B)
(1 sighting)



Tylodina corticalis (D&J)
(1 sighting)

* Not taken on the census day but a better depiction of the species

Final comments

I hope you enjoyed this summary, and that the images provided will help you to identify your finds in future events. Note that a lot of the species that were only found once were quite small – knowing their habitat is a key to finding them.

The outcomes have an interesting science heritage angle. Some of the earliest work describing sea slugs from the Sydney region was conducted by George French Angas and published in 1864. In that important paper, Angas described 29 new species from the “Port Jackson region of NSW”. Our surveys recorded 12 of these species. Interestingly, only one of them has retained its original name – *Doris chrysothorax* (although it changed to *Neodoris chrysothorax* in the intervening years, the name recently reverted to its original form).

Finally, a very big THANKYOU to:

All of you for your enthusiastic participation and to the amazing URG organising team led by Rianti Bieler (who was so committed to the cause she didn’t even dive on the day!).

Our sponsors, Tim Hochgrebe (who donated 2 copies of the second edition of Coleman’s Nudibranch Encyclopaedia), Abyss Scuba Diving for providing free air-fills for participants.

SCU for their support, and especially Prof Geraldine Mackenzie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) for officially recognising the event as an activity within SCU’s inaugural Research Week, and for adopting a nudibranch as the emblem for the week (see below – *Goniobranchus splendidus* – one of Angas’s species). The Director of the SCU’s National Marine Science Centre, Prof Les Christidis also provided generous logistic support for the event.

See you all next year in Sydney – or in Port Stephens for the 2nd Nelson Bay Nudi Festival from 12-13 December 2015.



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