

New records on the opisthobranch fauna of the Greek seas

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Five opisthobranch species (Pleurobranchus testudinarius, Caloria elegans, Dondice banyulensis, Janolus cristatus and Flabellina babai) unrecorded up-to-date in the Greek seas along with Scyllaea pelagica and Notarchus punctatus species reported after more than a century from their first finding in the Mediterranean (southern Aegean—Milos and Serifos Islands) by Forbes (1844), and zoogeographical and ecological details, are presented in this study. Scyllaea pelagica, N. punctatus and F. babai seem to have a narrow distribution in Greek waters while the rest of the species seem well established similar to what has been reported from other seas in the western Mediterranean or the Atlantic.

Keywords: new species, opisthobranch fauna, Greek seas

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INTRODUCTION

Over 6000 opisthobranch species occur all over the world (Mc Donald, 2006) while inventories of the Mediterranean molluscs include over 600 species in this subclass (Cattaneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990; Costello *et al.*, 2001). Despite the fact that many authors have provided information on opisthobranch molluscs of the eastern Mediterranean and the Greek seas in particular (see Koutsoubas & Koukouras, 1993, review and references therein; Koutsoubas *et al.*, 1993, 2000a, b; Koutsoubas & Cinelli, 1996; Zenetos *et al.*, 2005) there is no doubt that our knowledge on the opisthobranch fauna of these seas is rather limited when compared with other areas of the Mediterranean or the neighbouring north-eastern Atlantic Ocean. Taking into account recent papers providing information on opisthobranch mollusc fauna or invasive mollusc species (e.g. Koutsoubas, 2004; Pancucci-Papadopoulou *et al.*, 2006; Daskos & Zenetos, 2007; Zenetos *et al.*, 2007; Mollo *et al.*, 2008) of the Greek seas (Aegean, Ionian, Sea of Kythira and Libyan Sea) the total number of opisthobranch mollusc fauna of these seas is greater than 160 species. This study aims to provide new data and information about opisthobranch species that have been recently collected and photographed alive in various sites of the Greek seas, along with details on their distribution and habitat.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Intensive oceanographic studies over the last 2 decades in the framework of national and EU funded Projects have significantly contributed to the investigation of many areas and habitat types extended in the Greek seas, and consequently

to the collection of new material concerning marine biota. Furthermore, the application of a new Law (3409/273/2005) concerning a release of many areas for SCUBA diving activities in the Greek seas has offered the opportunity for divers to investigate many of the previously unexplored areas. Finally, the worldwide diffusion of knowledge via the internet and the training function of some web fora such as the www.seaslugforum.net, has offered the opportunity for many people to search and have closer contact with the fascinating world of marine biota. Biological samples obtained by the authors themselves, along with material (living animals or photographs) collected by divers in various sites of the Greek seas (Table 1; Figure 1) and acknowledged to the authors has led to the identification of the opisthobranch species presented in this study. Specimens collected were stored in 96% ethanol and are deposited in the collection of the Natural History Museum of Crete (NHMC) for further analysis. Nomenclature used for opisthobranchs followed the *Check List of European Marine Mollusca (CLEMAM)* (<http://www.somali.asso.fr/clemam/biotaxis.php>).

RESULTS

SYSTEMATICS

Notarchus punctatus (Philippi, 1836)
Notarchus punctatus, Pruvot-Fol, 1954:103
Synonyms: *Aplysia saltator*, Forbes 1844
Order: Anaspidea Fisher 1883
Superfamily: Aplysioidea
Family: Aplysiidae

MATERIAL

Two specimens from Rio (Patraikos Gulf).

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Table 1. The locations of the recorded opisthobranchs.

Code	Location	Geographical area	Coordinates	
			Longitude (N)	Latitude (E)
1	Bali	Cretan Sea	35,40°	24,78°
2	Souda	Cretan Sea	35,49°	24,06°
3	Elounda	Cretan Sea	35,26°	25,72°
4	Kalamos islands	Ionian Sea	38,59°	20,88°
5	Patraikos gulf	Ionian Sea	38,30°	21,78°
6	Paxoi	Ionian Sea	39,18°	20,15°
7	Aigio	Korinthiakos Gulf	38,26°	22,08°
8	Loutraki	Korinthiakos Gulf	38,00°	22,92°
9	Sterna	Korinthiakos Gulf	38,04°	22,88°
10	Rio	Patraikos Gulf	38,308°	21,78°
11	Ambelos	North Aegean Sea	39,96°	23,96°
12	Charamida beach	North Aegean Sea	39,01°	26,55°
13	Mersinia islands	North Aegean Sea	38,96°	26,50°
14	Small Charamida	North Aegean Sea	39,01°	26,56°
15	Steno Oraion	North Evvoikos Gulf	38,92°	22,96°
16	Aigina	Saronikos Gulf	37,73°	23,53°
17	Attiki coast	Saronikos Gulf	37,70°	23,90°
18	Laurio	Saronikos Gulf	37,71°	24,06°
19	Limanakia	Saronikos Gulf	37,81°	23,76°
20	Vouliagmenis Nisides Petrokaravo	Saronikos Gulf	37,61°	23,47°
21	Amorgos	South Aegean, Kyklades Plateau	36,82°	25,85°
22	Dilos reef, Panermos Gulf, Naxos	South Aegean, Kyklades Plateau	36,94°	25,52°
23	Milos island	South Aegean, Kyklades Plateau	36,69°	24,44°
24	Coastal zone of Attiki	South Evvoikos Gulf	37,70°	23,90°
25	Dipsa island	South Evvoikos Gulf	38,11°	24,11°
26	Ramnous	South Evvoikos Gulf	38,19°	24,05°
27	Vgethi	South Evvoikos Gulf	37,81°	24,06°

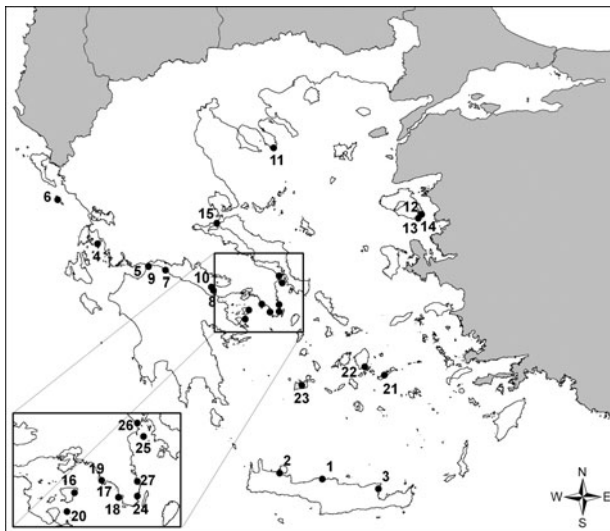


Fig. 1. The locations of the recorded opisthobranchs. Codes correspond to sampling locations shown in Table 1.

DISTRIBUTION

Mediterranean Spain (Cervera *et al.*, 2004), Italy—coasts of Naples (Engel, 1936) and Turkey—Antalya (Yokes, 2002a).

NOTES

The species, which was firstly reported from the Greek seas by Forbes (1844), was found on *Cymodosea nodosa* meadow (Figure 2).

SYSTEMATICS

Pleurobranchus testudinarius Cantraine, 1835

Oscanius testudinarius, Pruvot-Fol, 1954: 221, figure 85

Synonyms: *Oscanius testudinarius* Cantraine, 1840;

Pleurobranchus tuberculatus Delle Chiaje

Order: NOTASPIDEA

Superfamily: PLEUROBRANCHOIDEA

Family: PLEUROBRANCHIDAE

MATERIAL

One specimen from the Mersinia islets (Lesvos Island, northern Aegean), 2 specimens from Mount Athos (Chalkidiki Peninsula, northern Aegean), 1 specimen from Nisides Petrokaravo (Saronikos Gulf, southern Aegean), 1 specimen from Panermos beach (Naxos Island, southern Aegean), 2 specimens off the coasts of Bali and Chania bays correspondingly (Crete island, southern Aegean) and finally 2 specimen from Kalamos and Paxos Islands (Ionian Sea).

DISTRIBUTION

Eastern (Canary and Selvagens Islands, Madeira, the Azores: Cervera *et al.*, 2004), and western Atlantic (Brazil: Rudman, 2005); western (eastern Andalusia, Spanish Levant, Catalonia, Balearic Islands: Cervera *et al.*, 2004; Algeria, France, western Italy, Sicily: Pruvot-Fol, 1954) and eastern Mediterranean (coasts of south-eastern Turkey: Yokes, 2002b; Israel: Barash & Danin, 1971).

NOTES

The species is reported for the first time from the Greek seas. Animals were found in shallow and moderate depths (6–30 m) on various habitat types (rocky substrates covered with algae, sand and *Posidonia* meadows) (Figure 3).

SYSTEMATICS

Scyllaea pelagica Linnaeus, 1758

Scyllaea pelagica, Pruvot-Fol, 1954:367, figure 143 a–j

Synonyms: *Scyllaea ghomfodensis* Forskål, 1775; *Scyllaea*

edwardsii Verrill, 1878

Order: NUDIBRANCHIA Blainville, 1814

Superfamily: DENDRONOTOIDEA

Family: SCYLLAEIDAE



Fig. 2. *Notarchus punctatus* from Patraikos Gulf (photograph: F. Vilanakis).



Fig. 3. Individuals of *Pleurobranchus testudinarius* from Crete (left—photograph: J. Issaris) and Naxos Islands (right—photograph: M. Bardanis).

MATERIAL

Twenty individuals from Lesvos Island—Charamida beach (northern Aegean), 10 specimens are deposited in the NHMC reference FC: 10.186.

DISTRIBUTION

Cosmopolitan species with a worldwide distribution (Pruvot-Fol, 1954; Rudman, 2004); few records from the Mediterranean (Gulf of Naples: Schmekel, 1968; southern Aegean: Milos Island, Forbes, 1844 and Israel coasts: Barash & Danin, 1971).

NOTES

It is a pelagic opisthobranch living on pieces of floating kelp or *Sargassum* weed, where it feeds on attached hydroids (Rudman, 2004). It is worth mentioning that the species is recorded in this study after more than a century after its first finding in the Greek seas by Forbes (1844). Most of the individuals collected were attached on a floating rope at close distance from the coast, while 2 specimens were found crawling on rocks (Figure 4).

SYSTEMATICS

Janolus cristatus (Delle Chiaje, 1841)

Janolus cristatus, Schmekel & Portmann, 1982: 177, figure 7.48, plate 8a–f

Synonyms: *Eolis cristata* Delle Chiaje, 1841



Fig. 4. *Scyllaea pelagica* from Lesvos Island (photograph: D. Poursanidis).

Order: NUDIBRANCHIA Blainville, 1814
 Superfamily: ARMINOIDEA
 Family: PROTOCTONIDAE

MATERIAL

Many individuals from the Ionian Sea (Patraikos Gulf—Rio, 2 individuals; Korinthiakos Gulf—Aigio, 1 individual), the southern Aegean (Saronikos Gulf—Aigina Island, 1 individual; Crete Islands—Elounda, Chania, Souda Gulfs, 5 individuals) and the northern Aegean (Chalkidiki Peninsula—Ambelos area, 3 individuals).

DISTRIBUTION

North-eastern Atlantic from Norway to Morocco (Rudman, 1999), western (Strait of Gibraltar, eastern Andalusia, Catalonia: Cervera *et al.*, 2004; Palermo, Napoli: Schmekel & Portmann, 1982; Cattaneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990) and eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus: Athanasopoulos, 2006; south-eastern Turkey: Turkmen, 2004).

NOTES

The species is reported for the first time from the Greek seas. In most cases animals were found in shallow depths (8–20 m) on rocky substrates (Figure 5).

SYSTEMATICS

Flabellina babai Schmekel, 1972

Flabellina babai, Schmekel & Portman, 1982:191, figure 7.107f



Fig. 5. A specimen of *Janolus cristatus* from Korinthiakos Gulf (photograph: J. Issaris).

Order: NUDIBRANCHIA Blainville, 1814
 Superfamily: AEOLIDIOIDEA
 Family: FLABELLINIDAE

MATERIAL

Two individuals from Korinthiakos Gulf (Aigio and Loutraki).

DISTRIBUTION

North-eastern Atlantic (Portugal, Spain and Senegal: Rudman, 2002); western (Spain: Cervera *et al.*, 2004; France, Italy: Schmekel & Portmann, 1982) and eastern Mediterranean (Adriatic Sea, Croatia: Jaklin, 2006; Turkey: Yokes, 2002c).

NOTES

The species is reported for the first time from the Greek seas. Both individuals of the species were found in shallow depths (10–20 m) on rocky substrates (Figure 6).

SYSTEMATICS

Caloria elegans (Alder & Hancock, 1845)

Caloria elegans, Cattaneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990: 207, figures 171, 172, plate 12 figure 7

Synonyms: *Eolis elegans* Alder & Hancock, 1845; *Caloria maculata* Trinchese, 1888

Order: NUDIBRANCHIA Blainville, 1814

Superfamily: AEOLIDIOIDEA

Family: FACELINIDAE



Fig. 6. *Flabellina babai* from Korinthiakos Gulf (photograph: J. Issaris).



Fig. 7. Individual of *Caloria elegans* from Korinthiakos Gulf (photograph: J. Dimaresis).

MATERIAL

Six small individuals, measuring 1–2 cm in length, from northern Aegean (Lesvos Island—Small Charamida beach, 1 specimen preserved in ethanol 96%, deposited in the NHMC reference FC: 10.187), southern Aegean (coasts of Attiki—Lavrio and Vgethi; Amorgos Island) and Korinthiakos Gulf (Loutraki).

DISTRIBUTION

Eastern Atlantic (Portugal, Canary and Selvagens Islands, Madeira and the Azores: Thompson & Brown, 1984; Cervera *et al.*, 2004); western (Strait of Gibraltar, Spanish Levant, eastern Andalusia, Catalonia and Balearic islands: Cervera *et al.*, 2004; Italy and Sicily Straits: Schmekel & Portmann, 1982; Catanneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990) and eastern (south-eastern Turkey: Rudman, 2001; Goksel, 2005) Mediterranean.

NOTES

The species is reported for the first time from the Greek seas. All specimens were found crawling on individuals of the sponge *Aplysina aerophoba* at rocky substrates (Figure 7)

covered with algae vegetation—mainly *Padina pavonica* at depths from 2–15 m.

SYSTEMATICS

Dondice banyulensis Portmann & Sandmeier, 1960

Dondice banyulensis, Cattaneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990: 214, plate 13 figure 7

Synonyms: *Dondice nicolae* Vicente, 1967; *Godiva banyulensis* Schmekel & Portmann, 1982

Order: NUDIBRANCHIA Blainville, 1814

Superfamily: AEOLIDIOIDEA

Family: FACELINIDAE

MATERIAL

Few individuals from the Ionian Sea (Patraikos Gulf—Rio, 3 individuals; Korinthiakos Gulf—Aigio, 2 individuals), and the northern Aegean (Evoikos Gulf, 1 individual (Figure 8); Lesvos island, 1 individual).

DISTRIBUTION

North-eastern Atlantic (south-eastern England: Picton, 1979; Portugal: Cervera *et al.*, 2004), western Mediterranean (Strait of Gibraltar, eastern Andalusia, Spanish Levant, Catalonia, Balearic Islands: Cervera *et al.*, 2004; Ligurian Sea: Catanneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990; France, Naples: Schmekel & Portmann, 1982) and eastern Mediterranean (south-eastern Turkey: Yokes, 2002d).

NOTES

It is the largest aeolidian species in the Mediterranean Sea (Catanneo-Vietti *et al.*, 1990; Trainito, 2005). The species is often found in high energy environments such as with algae vegetation (*Caulerpa* sp.).

DISCUSSION

Taking into account valid records from previous authors along with records provided in this study a total of 166 opisthobranch are known from the Greek seas (almost 25% of the total gastropod fauna recorded from these seas). The most numerous opisthobranch species in the Greek seas

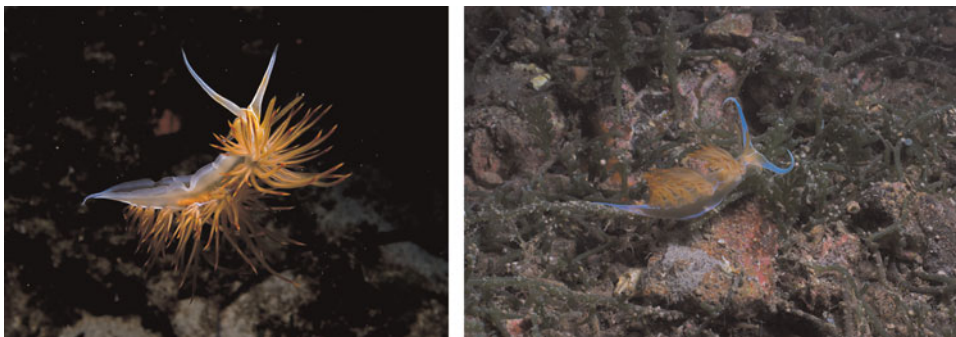


Fig. 8. *Dondice banyulensis* from Saronikos (left, photograph: J. Issaris) and Evoikos (right, photograph: J. Dimaresis) Gulfs.

are the Nudibranchia (63 species —almost 40% of the total fauna). The majority of the opisthobranch species distributed in the Greek seas have an Atlanto-Mediterranean affinity (almost 40% of the total opisthobranch fauna). However, the opisthobranch Mediterranean endemic species in the Greek seas constitute a major component of the opisthobranch fauna (almost 25% of the total number of species), a phenomenon similar to what has been reported not only for the opisthobranch fauna of the Mediterranean Sea (Cattaneo-Vietti & Thompson, 1989) but for the entire marine biota of this basin (Bianchi & Morri, 2000). It is worth mentioning that until almost the end of the 1990s only 2 ‘alien’ or ‘allochthonous’ opisthobranch species (i.e. *Bursatella leachii* De Blainville, 1817 and *Melibe fimbriata* Alder & Hancock, 1864) had been reported from the Greek seas (Thompson & Crampton, 1984; Koutsoubas & Koukouras, 1993; Koutsoubas & Cinelli, 1997) despite the neighbouring of the Greek seas with the Levantine Basin (area of the Mediterranean Sea in which alien species exceed 30% of the total recorded biota: Por & Dimentman, 1989).

However, over the last decade many alien opisthobranch species (e.g. *Acteocina mucronata*, *Bulla ampulla*, *Aplysia dactylomela*, *Chromodoris annulata* and *Syphonota geographica*) have been recorded (certain of them are well established in the Aegean and Ionian Seas: Zenetos *et al.*, 2004) thus implying an exponential rate of introduction of these species in this part of the Mediterranean (Zenetos *et al.*, 2005). The majority of the opisthobranch species (i.e. *Pleurobranchus testudinarius*, *Janolus cristatus*, *Caloria elegans* and *Dondice banyulensis*) recorded in the present study from the Greek seas known to have a wide distribution in different areas of the western Mediterranean, should be considered as well established also in the Greek seas as revealed by their frequent finding at different sites. The remaining species (i.e. *Notarchus punctatus*, *Scyllaea pelagica* and *Flabellina babai*) presented in this study have been recorded from one particular location and should be considered as rather ‘rare’ species as also proved by their restricted distribution in the whole Mediterranean (they have been reported from very few areas of this basin). Despite the fact that an important number of opisthobranch species have been recorded so far from the Greek seas, our knowledge on the opisthobranch fauna of these seas is far from complete. Future intensive sampling in less explored areas (e.g. Ionian Sea and Libyan Sea) and habitat types (e.g. coralligenous communities, semi-dark and dark caves) and facilitated by faster communication and use of electronic means is expected to significantly increase opisthobranch species records from the Greek seas in the near future.

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