

**Egidio Trainito, Mauro Doneddu: NUDIBRANCHI DEL MEDITERRANEO. 2<sup>a</sup> edizione, riveduta e ampliata. Il Castello, 2014, 192 p.**

Sea slugs are beautiful benthic molluscs mostly characterized by bright colouration and striking forms. During the course of evolution, their shell has been drastically reduced or has even disappeared. Of all the sea slugs, the nudibranchs are the most attractive to divers and underwater photographers because of their vivid colour patterns and a variety of forms. However, they are also interesting for some peculiar biological features, such as food specialization, bioactive compounds production, camouflage, mimicry, kleptoplasty and others.

Egidio Trainito is a well-known Italian marine biologist, author of numerous books on the matter of biodiversity in marine ecosystems. His production of scientific writings consists of a series of illustrated guides in the Italian language, including *Conchiglie del Mediterraneo* (Seashells of the Mediterranean), *Nudibranchi del Mediterraneo* (Nudibranchs of the Mediterranean), and others in English such as *Dive the World: The Most Fascinating Diving Sites* and *Atlas of Mediterranean Flora and Fauna*. He also published a specialized book on opisthobranchs, entitled *Mediterranean Harlequins - A Field Guide to Mediterranean Sea Slugs* (2003).

The co-author, Mauro Doneddu is also intrigued by all kinds of biodiversity topics and has already published several monographs on Sardinian butterflies, Mediterranean molluscs and even a book on the wild orchids of Sardinia.

Despite the fact that nudibranchs and other sea slugs are a favourite subject of underwater photographers, there are, paradoxically, only a few books available on the respective Mediterranean species. In some of these works, sea slugs are presented with drawings, for instance, in Pruvot-Fol (1954): *Faune de France: Mollusques opisthobranches* or Barletta (1980): *Gasteropodi*

*nudi. Guida per il riconoscimento*. In others, the writings are enriched by amazing illustrations, as is the case with the excellent monograph by Schmekel & Portmann (1982) entitled *Opisthobranchia des Mittelmeeres. Des limaces de Reve* (Bielecki et al., 2011) and *Sea Slugs of the Algarve* (Calado & Silva, 2012) on the other hand, are monographs based on excellent photographs. Although there are no such publications to date on the Adriatic Sea, a book entitled *Il regno dei nudibranchi* (The Realm of Nudibranchs), dealing with the nudibranchs of the restricted area of the Riviera del Conero (area close to Ancona) was recently published by Federico Betti.

The book by Trainito and Doneddu on Mediterranean nudibranchs is an expanded and revised second edition. The main emphasis in it is given to photographs. In fact, the great majority of species are illustrated with excellent close-up photos taken in the natural environment. This volume is an improvement over the previous edition in that it brings more information about the Mediterranean species in term of their distinguishing characteristics, distribution and up-to-date records. The title is somehow misleading, though, as not only nudibranchs, but also other opisthobranch sea slug orders, such as Cephalaspida, Anaspida, Saccoglossa, Umbraculoidea, Pleurobranchomorpha, Thecosomata, Acochlidacea, Gymnosomata and Rhodopida, are included in the book.

The monograph presents 363 species and over 650 photographs of Mediterranean Sea slugs made by 77 photographers. After short introductory chapters on nudibranchs and their revised taxonomy, the great bulk of the book is dedicated to a short description of the species and notes on biogeography completed with rich photographic material. On the one hand, it is still rather difficult for a reader to identify certain specimens from photographs or in hand, such as those of the genus *Doto* or to determine dorid species, and there are many taxonomic problems yet to solve, as well. On the other hand, the authors tried to collect all available data on



*Polycera quadrilineata* (Photo/Foto: B. Mavrič)



*Thordis filix* (Photo/Foto: B. Mavrič)

certain less known species, found only in one or few occasions, which give added value to the book. In such cases photographs are generally not available, so the authors provided authentic illustrations of such species derived from their first descriptions.

In the recent decades, a considerable number of opisthobranch species were discovered due to a growing scientific interest in and divers' fascination with all parts of the Mediterranean Sea. One of such results is also the present book, which synthesises the research

findings on opisthobranchs obtained via diving excursions around the Mediterranean and through collection of available data in scientific literature. To my opinion, this publication should be considered as the ultimate guide for marine biologists, but will prove equally helpful to divers, snorkelers, naturalists, scientists and photographers. I am not at all surprised that it is already considered a bible on Mediterranean nudibranchs by certain malacologists.

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