
Distribution and Finding

Due to their size, colour pattern, and fluid motion polyclads can be detected quite often while SCUBA diving. Most common, they can be seen out and about on or under ledges along the reef slope during the day. They are found in crevices, under rocks and sometimes on bare sediment surfaces or muddy substrates. Some species can even be seen swimming off the reef crest. Polyclads like to rest on or nearby their favorite food and can occasionally be detected on sponges or colonial ascidians, most often under boulders at the reef crest. The cryptic species are found more rarely because they blend with the underground when resting in their normal habitat.

For SCUBA divers and UW photographers who are interested in finding polyclads it is highly recommended to take a look under boulders and to turn around coral rubble. Assuming luck and some patience novel polyclad species may be found. However, one should be careful in touching or handling these sensible worms. Polyclads have the ability to self-destruct under stress. They autolyse, break into mucous fragments or contract and contort making further examination and photographing impossible. Furthermore, they lose their distinct colour pattern. Therefore, most representative photos are probably taken as long as these worms stay undisturbed in their normal habitat.

Since description of new species can only be accomplished if specimen are collected, preserved and studied in detail, special techniques for fixation and preservation of collected specimen have been developed. Divers with scientific interest in polyclad biology who like to contribute to the identification of novel species, are encouraged to contact [Dr. Leslie Newman](#) (School of Resource Science and Management, Southern Cross University, PO Box 157, Lismore, NSW, Australia 2480), who has developed a reliable method for fixation and preservation. [Leslie](#) currently works on the biodiversity of Indo-Pacific polyclads and has set up a worldwide database with more than 350 species of polyclads including information on their feeding and reproductive biology.

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