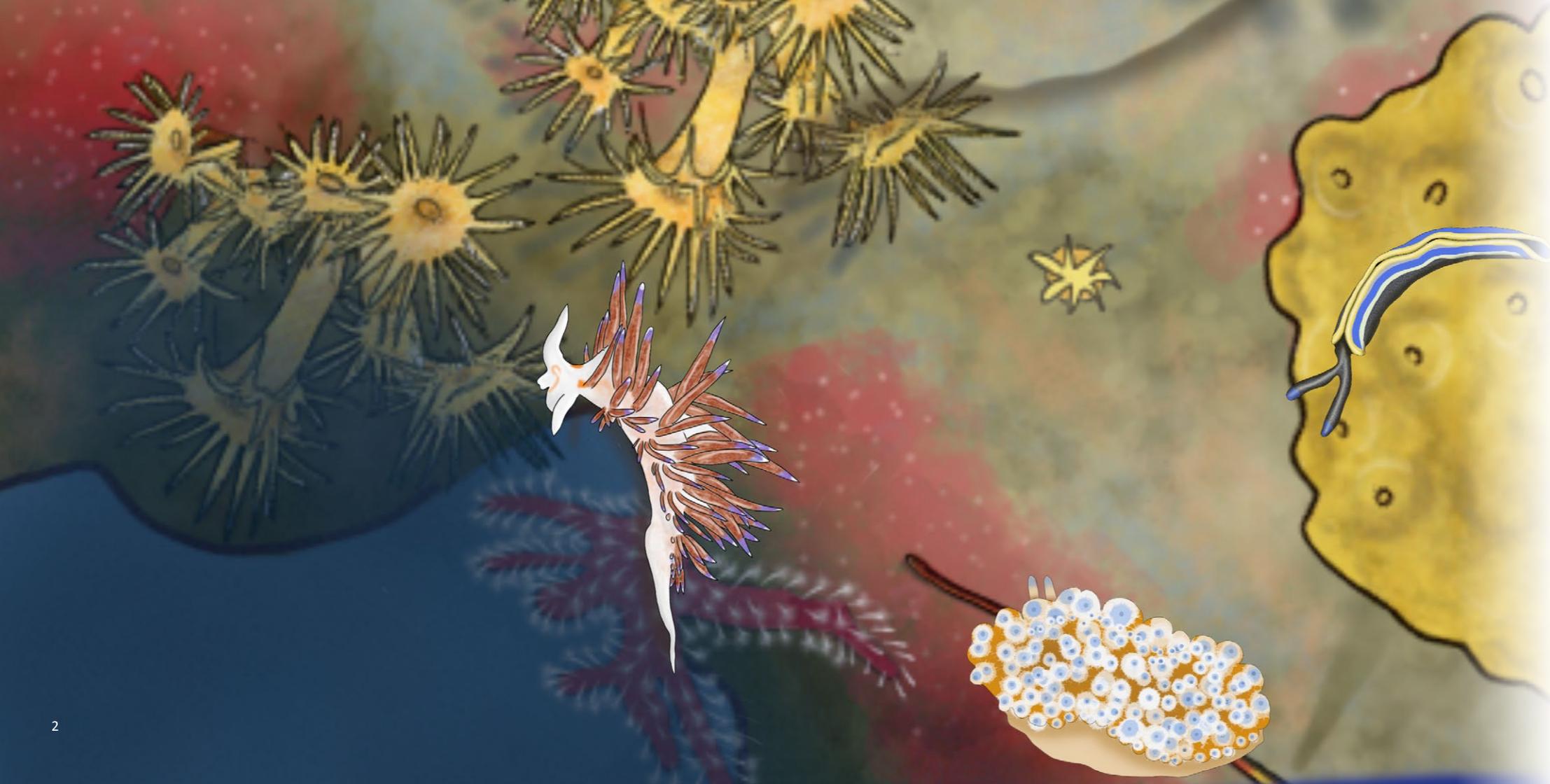


MACRO LENS: NUDIBRANCHS, UNEXPECTED COLOURS AND SHAPES





MACRO LENS: NUDIBRANCHS, UNEXPECTED COLOURS AND SHAPES

Nudibranchs, often called blennies or sea slugs, are shell-less snails, highly abundant in the Mediterranean, standing out for their very bright colours and with surprising combinations, which make them considered as the “butterflies of the sea”.

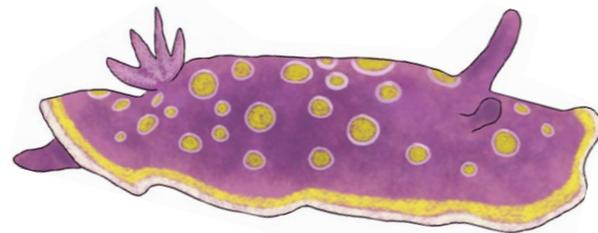
Finding nudibranchs is often a surprise and makes many divers count these findings as special moments and they are always on the look out to see new species with different shapes and colours.

NUDIBRANCHS

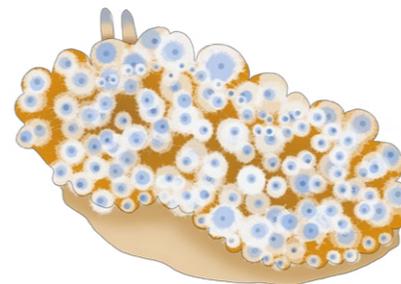
It must be said that they are part of a much larger group (called heterobranchs) all of which are shell-less snails, or with a very small or hidden shell, and it is common for divers to call them nudibranchs in a general way to cover the whole group.

On our coast there are about 150 different species, each with a shape and colour pattern of its own with sizes ranging from a few millimetres to about 5 centimetres, although there are some species that can reach more than 20 and 30 centimetres.

It would seem that these slugs, which have lost the defence mechanism of its shell, are easy prey for fish or other molluscs and that they should camouflage themselves rather than attracting attention with their striking colours. This is sometimes the case, but the ones that we see (with bright colours), have replaced their shell with a chemical defence mechanism such as urticant or toxic cells, and their colour warns possible predators of this.



Felimida luteorosea



Janolus
Janolus Cristatus



Hypselodoris

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

It is considered that there are about 150 species in the sea along the Catalonia coast-line, and more than 3,000 worldwide.

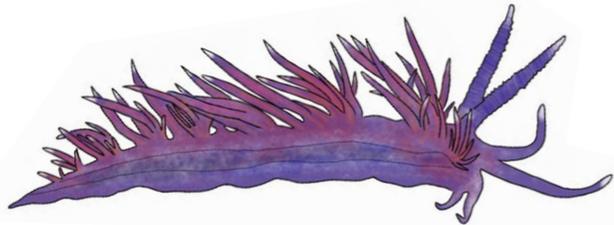
Its classification is not totally agreed upon and it is constantly under review, in addition, new species are observed on a regular basis.

This great diversity has made these animals authentic jewels to record observations and are a popular subject for many “macro” photographers.

As they are such a diverse group we find them in various habitats. Some feed on algae and others on small crustaceans and even other nudibranchs, and they have different breeding strategies, although they all lay eggs and they are hermaphrodites.

WE SET A CHALLENGE FOR YOU!

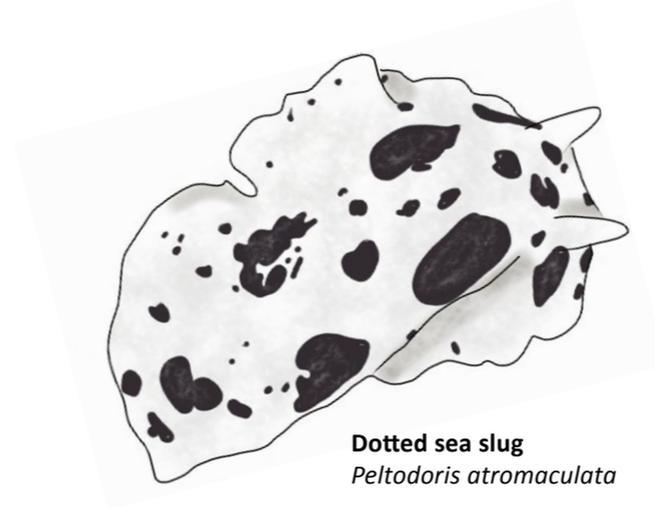
The *Flabellinas*, the sea cow species and the *Thuridilla* are some common nudibranchs, don't let the diving season end without locating, at least one specimen of each species, they can be seen all year long!



Flabellina
Flabellina affinis

Flabellinas. This is one of the best-known species for divers; it's impossible to confuse them with any other. Their colour is due to their urticating ability resulting from eating sea feathers and incorporating their urticant cells into the fluorescent protuberances to ward off predators.

They are usually between 2 and 5 centimetres long and we can find them at all depths; like almost all their relatives, they live on the seabed, between the incrustations of the rocks and walls.

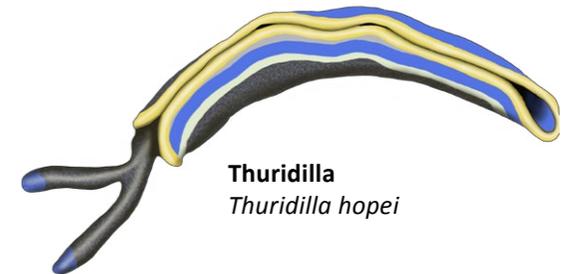


Dotted sea slug
Peltodoris atromaculata

As for the **dotted sea slug**, although their colours are not as bright, they are also unmistakable. They can measure up to 15 centimetres long which makes them easy to spot and they live anywhere from the surface waters up to 50 metres deep, usually in the most vertical walls.

Like Flabellinas, they acquire a chemical defence from their main source of food, a sponge called *petrosia*.

Thuridillas are very common opisthobranchs, which can often be missed due to their small size. Its blue, yellowy-orange and white coloured body has two "wings" that it has folded into its back, and it has two very large antennae on its head.



Thuridilla
Thuridilla hopei

WHERE THEY CAN BE SEEN

As they are distributed throughout various habitats, it is possible to see nudibranchs in all the dives and even when snorkelling. The best strategy is to look for the species they feed on or the micro-habitat they occupy and, once the site is located, observe them carefully and closely.

Lots of them eat a single particular food, such as sponges, sea feathers, or gorgonians, and they never move away from their food supply. Others are associated with habitats with algae, posidonia or sandy bottoms, this will mark out the area in which to look for them.

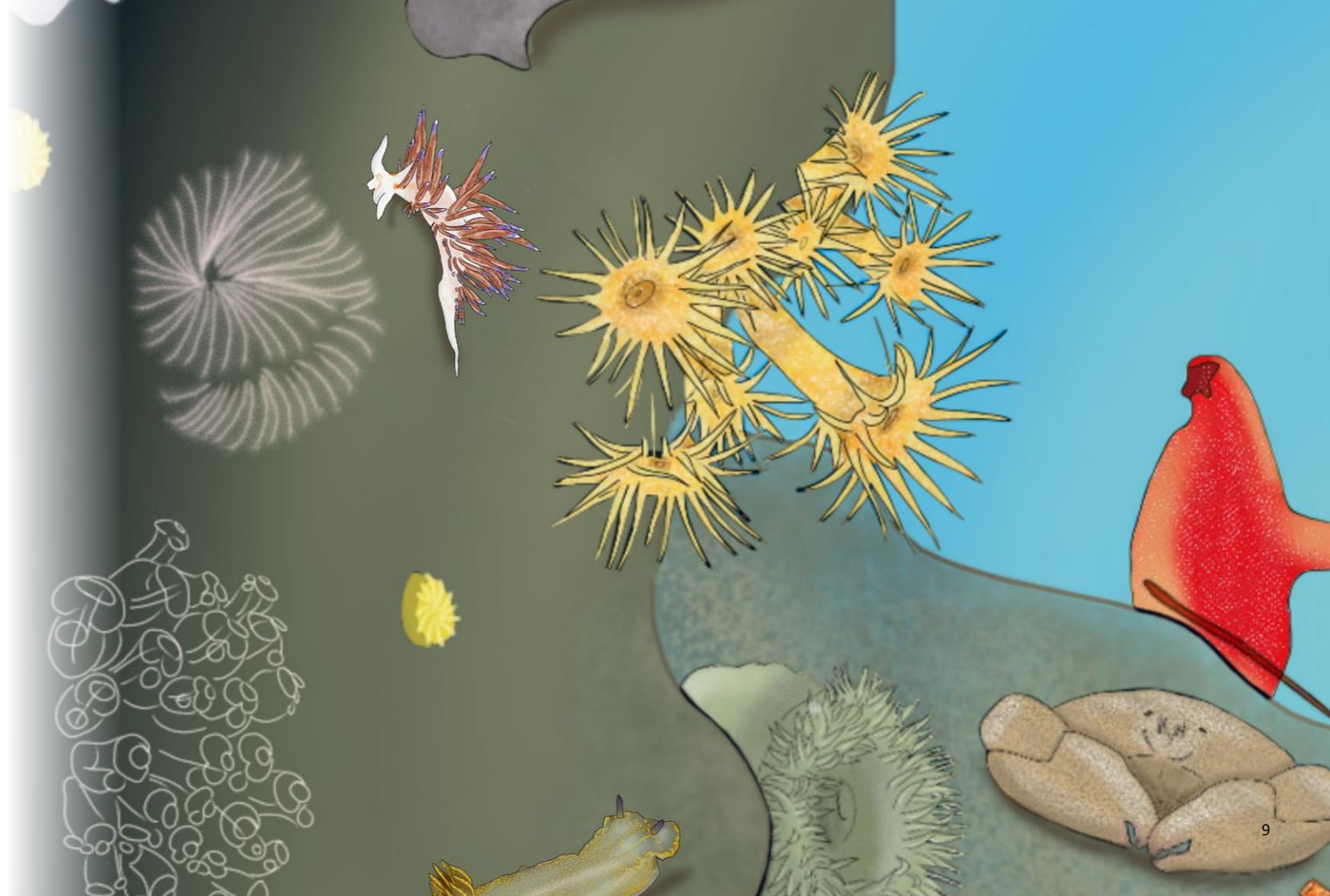
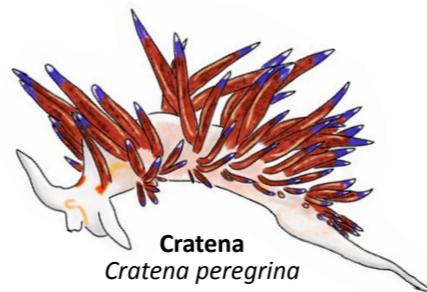
Talk to your guide, although they do move, they usually stay in the same area, and they will know the best places to see them to suggest to you.

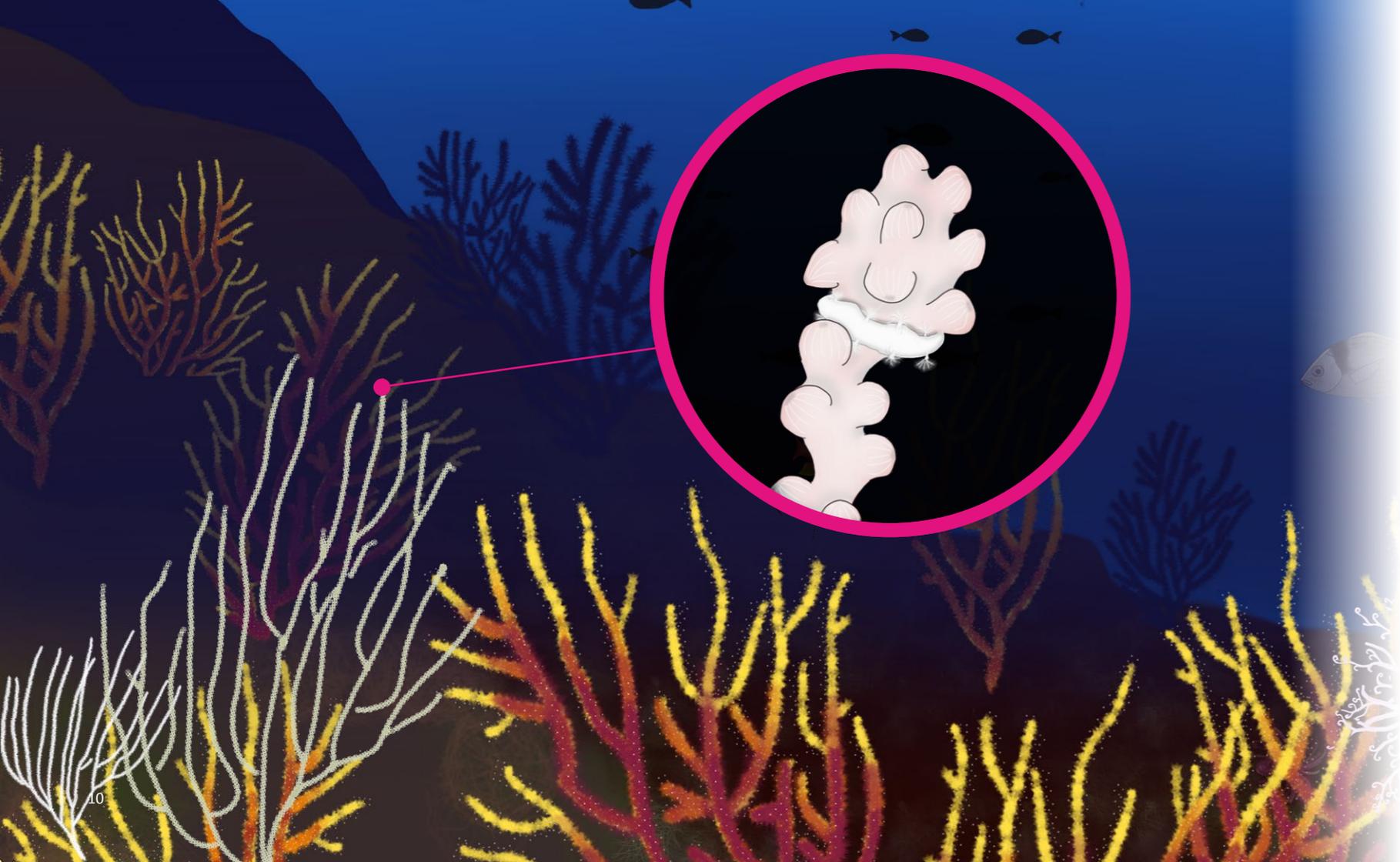
HOW TO SEE THEM

To find them we must change our observation scale and focus on all the small details.

Some divers who are fans of the nudibranchs even use magnifying glasses to detect the smaller ones. Although we don't need to go to such extremes, it will be necessary to carefully scour each segment of the seabed to find them: a point that bursts forth with colour before our eyes.

They are often a popular shot for photographers since they are very photogenic, we will have to use macro lenses and keep the camera very stable.





PRECAUTIONS

As they are small and require careful observation, it is necessary to be very careful when it comes to seeing nudibranchs. It is very important to control your buoyancy well so as not to damage the organisms on the rocks with your knees or fins and to take care not to touch the seabed.

If we think that it is impossible to look for them without damaging the environment and other organisms in a certain area, we move on and try looking for them further away.

ALSO...

It is not a nudibranch, but rather an opisthobranch, however, we can consider it a relative, it is the sea hare, a mollusc with no outer shell that measures between 20 and 40 centimetres when it is an adult.

Although it spends much of the time on the seabed, it swims with elegant undulating movements, especially in the evening and at night.

It lives in shallow depths, and when a diver discovers one swimming, usually alone, it's an unforgettable moment.



Sea slug
Aplysia fasciata



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