

Mediterranean

miquel pontes

nudibranchs

Hypselodoris villafranca
(Risso, 1818)

Hypselodoris villafranca is a dorid nudibranch first described by Risso in 1818. It is one of the most attractive opisthobranch molluscs in the Mediterranean Sea with its delicate shapes and bright coloured body. It was formerly known as *Glossodoris gracilis*, *Hypselodoris gracilis* or *Chromodoris villafranca*.

Among the main traits identifiable by a diver we point out the dark blue coloured body with a yellow band encircling the entire notal margin. There are other yellow bands that run longitudinally along the dorsum that can be discontinuous and often subdivide into smaller ones. There is also a light blue, iridescent, discontinuous line that runs parallel to the notum margin. This species presents colour variations depending on the zone and probably the age. The specimens that illustrate this article are all from the Costa Brava, in the North-East of Spain.

The *Hypselodoris villafranca* reaches a maximum size of 25 to 36 mm depending on the authors. Rhinophores show up to 20 small plates (*lamella*) that join in a zigzag white line visible in their back side. The 6-8 unipinnate branchial plumes are also blue and often show a white band on the outer side. These organs can be hidden in yellow ringed sheaths when the animal is disturbed. The foot is thinner than the notum and the back tip is clearly visible protruding behind it.

Vayssière wrote an excellent description for this species so we transcribe it from the original work in French: "Couleur générale bleu indigo, offrant un aspect velouté, avec nombreuses lignes d'un jaune fauve ou jaune orangé, disposées longitudinalement et reliées entre elles par des lignes obliques et transversales plus fines. Une large liseré jaune-d'or borde la face dorsale du manteau, et est accompagné en dehors d'une bande bleu très pâle. (...) Rhinophores d'un bleu plus pâle, de même pour les feuillets branchiaux qui montrent une ligne jaune pâle sur l'arête des deux côtés."

This nudibranch is often found over calcareous algae from shallow water down to coralliferous areas around 40 meters deep, and feeds primarily on *Ircina*, *Spirastrella* or *Dysidea* sponges. Some authors qualify this species as uncommon while most others say it is frequent. It is distributed all along the Mediterranean and close Atlantic.

The reader may find more information in Erwin Köhler's excellent site about Mediterranean Nudibranchs: Medslugs (http://www.medslugs.de/E/Mediterranean/Hypselodoris_villafranca.htm)

This month Miquel Pontes was assisted by Josep M^a Dacosta in preparing this article and supplying the images.



Fig. 1 © 2000 Miquel Pontes



Fig.2 © 2000 Josep M^a Dacosta



Fig.3 © 2000 Josep M^a Dacosta

