

mediterranean

miquel pontes

nudibranchs

Spurilla neapolitana

Described by Delle Chiaje in 1841, this is a medium sized nudibranch, reaching 5 to 7 cm long and half this size wide. It lives in shallow water, from 1 metre deep, under stones and in seagrass meadows. It is also found on certain algae.

It is colored light pink to brown, the dorsum with a darker shade than the rest of the body. Many specimens show white spots, which gives them a typical mottled appearance.

The *Spurilla neapolitana* has a pair of light brown cephalic tentacles and two lamellated rhinophores, usually colored white but dorsally colored light brown. These organs are presumably used to search for food and mate. The eyes are located behind the base of the rhinophores.

The dorsal appendixes or *cerata* are distributed in 8 to 12 groups on each side of the animal, and have a flattened shape with curled white tips. They are usually coloured brown to dark green. Depending on the local feeding habits – the colour being given by intestine ramifications in the *cerata*, which show their contents through the body wall.

The colour of certain parts of the body may suggest the presence of symbiotic algae (*zooxanthellae*) acquired from its food, which may eventually help the animal to complete its energy source (see the article *Solar Powered Sea-Slugs* at the **Sea Slug Forum** <http://www.austmus.gov.au/seaslugs/solarpow.htm>).

The colour of the tip of each *cerata* is white because of the cnidosacs – accumulations of active stinging cells for defensive purposes obtained from its prey, the sea anemones *Anemonia viridis*, *Aiptasia mutabilis* or *Bunodactis verrucosa*. In fact the *Spurilla neapolitana* is often found in the neighborhood of these cnidarians.

This *aeolid* reproduces in summer, from June to August. The egg strings are coloured white and laid in a scalloped spiral shape on the substrate.

Some authors qualify this species as uncommon, while others say it is abundant; in any case, it is more frequent in winter but present the whole year-round. Most authors specify that the *Spurilla neapolitana* is distributed along all the Mediterranean basin and the nearby Atlantic Ocean, but there are documented sightings reported in the West Atlantic, from Florida to Brazil, in Baja California and Hawaii.

Two of the pictures displayed with this article clearly show a copepod parasitization on the back of the nudibranch, seen as a kind of white appendixes on the *dorsum* of the animal, which correspond to the twin egg sacks of the parasite.

You can find more information and pictures at the following web sites: Medslugs at http://www.medslugs.de/E/Mediterranean/Spurilla_neapolitana.htm and the Sea Slug Forum at <http://www.austmus.gov.au/seaslugs/spurneap.htm>

