

## The non-indigenous stolidobranch ascidian *Polyandrocarpa zorritensis* in the Mediterranean: description, larval morphology and pattern of vascular budding

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### Abstract

The stolidobranch ascidian *Polyandrocarpa zorritensis* was detected, for the third time in the Mediterranean, in the harbour of Taranto (South Italy). Colonies develop vigorously on all hard substrata in shallow water and now represent one of the most important elements of the local fouling community. In this article specimens of the Mediterranean populations of the species are described. The morphology of the larva, which differs from that of other Polyzoinae, and a vascular budding mechanism of replication, similar to that known to occur in the Botryllinae, were both observed for the first time.

**Key words:** Non-indigenous ascidian, Mediterranean Sea, *Polyandrocarpa zorritensis*, vegetative replication, morphology, vascular budding, larvae

### Introduction

The non-indigenous ascidian *Polyandrocarpa zorritensis* (Van Name 1931), originally described from Peru, was found in the northern Mediterranean in summer 1974 (Brunetti 1978–79). Subsequently, in 1986, the species was found in the eastern Mediterranean (Turon & Perera 1988). More recently (June 2001) during a research project undertaken to evaluate the conditions of the marine ecosystem (SPICAMAR, Italian Ministry of Scientific Research), the species was found in the southern Mediterranean (Taranto, Italy). The following description, including information on the mechanism of replication is based on the abundant Mediterranean population of this species.