

First observation of the nudibranch *Tenellia* feeding on the scleractinian coral *Pavona decussata*

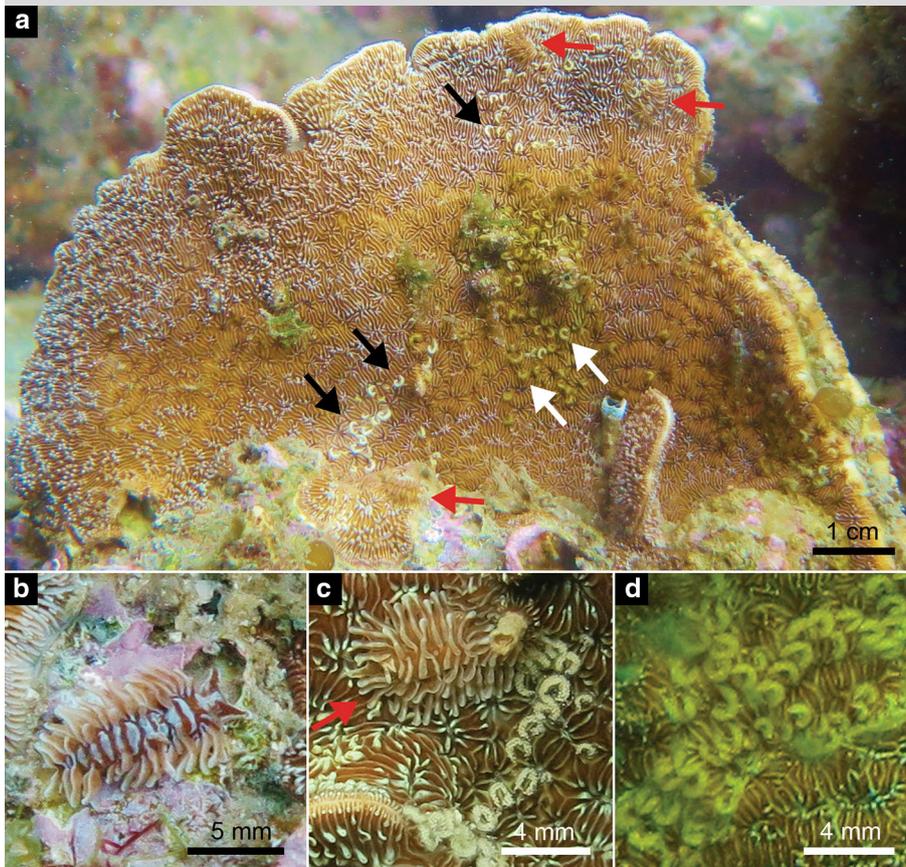


Fig. 1 **a** *Tenellia* nudibranchs (red arrows), egg masses (black arrows) and egg masses with algal overgrowth (white arrows) on a transplanted coral fragment of *P. decussata*; **b** close-up of a nudibranch removed carefully from *P. decussata*; **c** a nudibranch (arrow) with excellent camouflage and some egg masses; and **d** egg masses covered with algal overgrowth

taceans could have limited the abundance of nudibranchs on natural coral surfaces (Gochfeld and Aeby 1997). Algae were observed rapidly growing over *Tenellia* egg masses (Fig. 1d), potentially affecting their hatching success. The prevalence of *Tenellia* corallivory on *P. decussata* in other tropical and subtropical coral communities remains to be verified.

References

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Some *Tenellia* nudibranchs are known to be corallivores (Cella et al. 2016) that prey on poritid and dendrophylliid corals (Ritson-Williams et al. 2003). We report here the first record of a *Tenellia* nudibranch feeding on an agariciid coral, *Pavona decussata*. These nudibranchs (max. length observed ~10 mm) were first found during detailed examination of transplanted coral fragments of *P. decussata* in Chek Chau, Hong Kong, southern China. They were subsequently also found on natural coral colonies, inflicting feeding scars along the path of their movement. These nudibranchs display excellent mimicry (Fig. 1). Their body pattern of alternating brown and white stripes closely resembles the septa of *P. decussata* (Fig. 1b, c). Their cerata are also very similar to the tentacles of *P. decussata*, which are usually extended, even in daytime. Clumps of white egg capsules (each ~2 mm in length) (Fig. 1c) were also observed on the surface of coral colonies all year round.

High densities (>1 individual cm⁻²) of *Tenellia* caused rapid and heavy mortality of *P. decussata* colonies grown in our laboratory aquaria. However, very low densities (<1 individual m⁻²) of nudibranchs were found on natural colonies of *P. decussata* encountered in our field surveys. Coral tissue damage caused by the nudibranchs in nature was therefore limited. Predation by fishes and crus-