

Life of the ctenostome bryozoan *Pherusella* cf. *brevituba*

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Bryozoans are colonial filter-feeders and inhabit predominantly marine benthic ecosystems. The most common and diverse groups of bryozoans are the calcified Stenolaemata and Cheilostomata, whereas ctenostomes are uncalcified and comprise about 300 species. The ctenostome genus *Pherusella* comprises three species *P. tubulosa*, *P. brevituba* and *P. flabellaris*. *Pherusella brevituba* was first described in 1951 by Soule and was reported along the pacific coast of North America. In 2005 *P. brevituba* was reported inhabiting seagrass leaves of *Posidonia oceanica* in the Mediterranean Sea for the first time and nowadays considered as invasive species. So far, documentation and long term study of the life cycle and morphology of this species is lacking. Consequently, *P. brevituba* was regularly sampled along the Croatian coast of the North Adriatic Sea. Colonies rarely contained more than 4 to 6 zooids. Already young colonies of two zooids start to reproduce early and the maternal zooid produces up to four lecithotrophic larvae. Several colonies were kept under laboratory condition which enabled the documentation and analysis of larval release and metamorphosis. Free-swimming larvae settle shortly after hatching on new uninhabited parts of *P. oceanica*. So far this species is not reported on any other substrate in the Mediterranean Sea and with its short and peculiar lifecycle it seems perfectly adapted to the grows pattern of *P. oceanica*. Currently, the general life cycle and preliminary morphological analysis shows distinct differences to the original *P. brevituba* from the Pacific which forms large of often erect colonies. Further studies will analyse the zooidal and larval morphology in more detail. Additionally, original material from the pacific specimens will be obtained in order to verify the species status of the Mediterranean species.