

Didemnid Sea Squirts

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Didemnum species*

AKA: Carpet sea squirt, D. vex

Native to: Not known

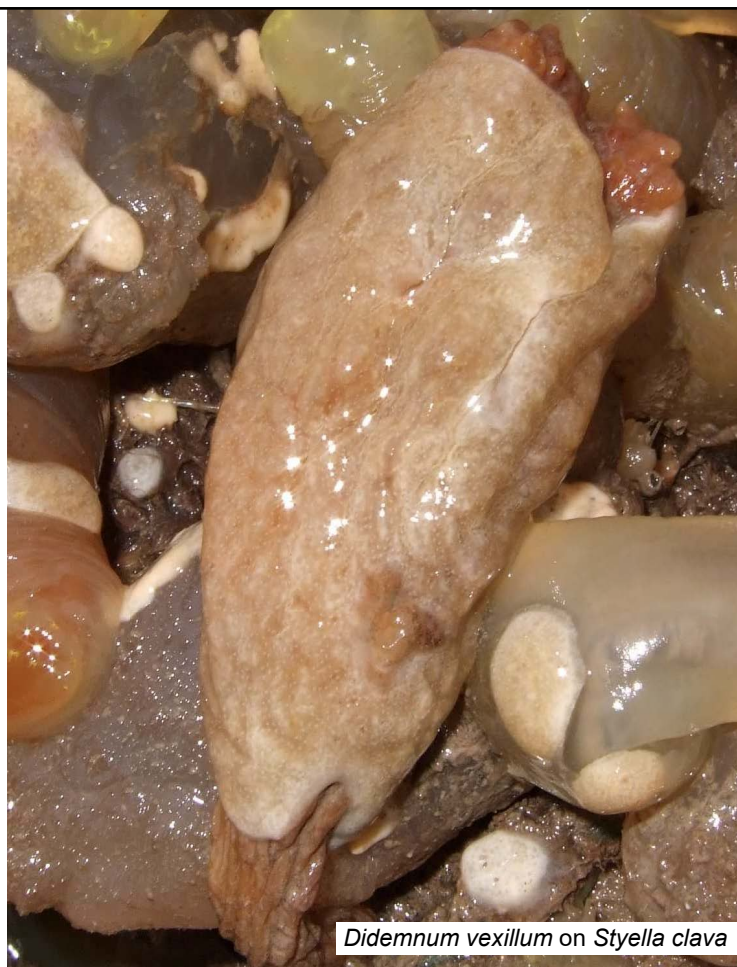
Habitat: Coastal areas on hard substrates up to 65 m below sea level

Immobile tube-like invertebrates occurring in colonies with an anterior inhalant and dorsal exhalant through which seawater is filtered for food. They are readily distinguished from other colonial sea squirts by their extensively lobed form. Colonies of *Didemnum* species have been reported to grow in sheets or mats which can be tan, cream, yellow, orange or pinkish in colour.

They have been introduced to Northern Ireland waters through a variety of pathways including aquaculture equipment, hull fouling and ship ballast water. Negative impacts are a result of colonies overgrowing and swamping other species and covering fish spawning grounds, aquaculture cages etc.

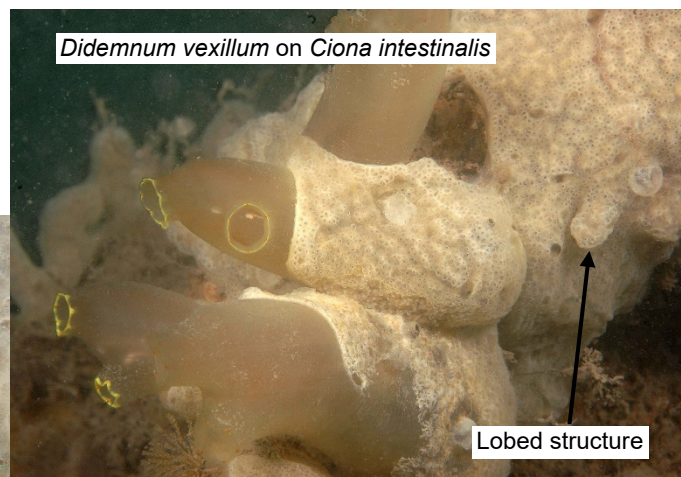
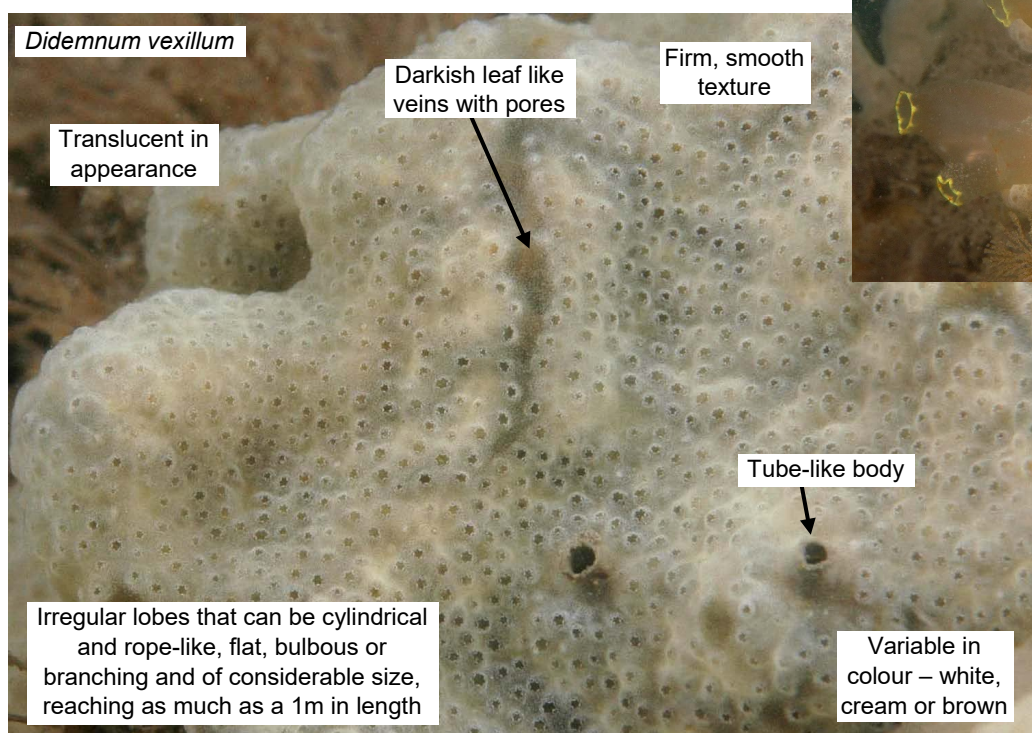
While *Didemnum* sea squirts have been observed primarily colonising artificial substrates in harbours such as boats, submarine structures, pontoons and other human constructions, there are fears that natural reefs may become susceptible.

***Didemnum vexillum* is listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.**



Didemnum vexillum on *Styella clava*

Key ID Features



Didemnum vexillum on *Ciona intestinalis*

Lobed structure

Didemnum vexillum can be difficult to positively identify and requires expert advice if it is suspected to be present

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/IS/>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

The appearance of *Didemnum vexillum* remains constant throughout the year.

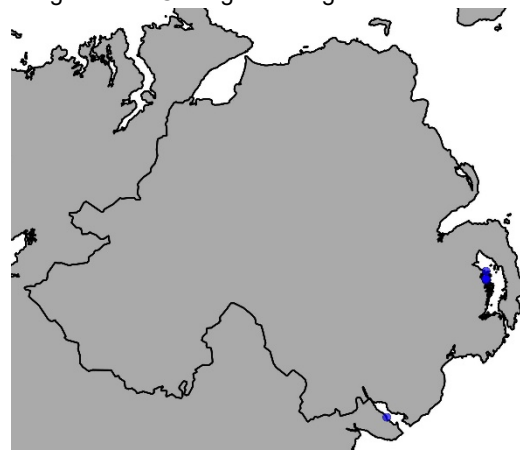
Field signs

On hard substrates, they are common to depths below 30m and have been found down to 65m. They can tolerate temperatures from -2°C to 24°C, but have been collected only at salinities above 26 parts per thousand.



Distribution

Didemnum vexillum sea squirts have been recorded in Strangford and Carlingford Lough.



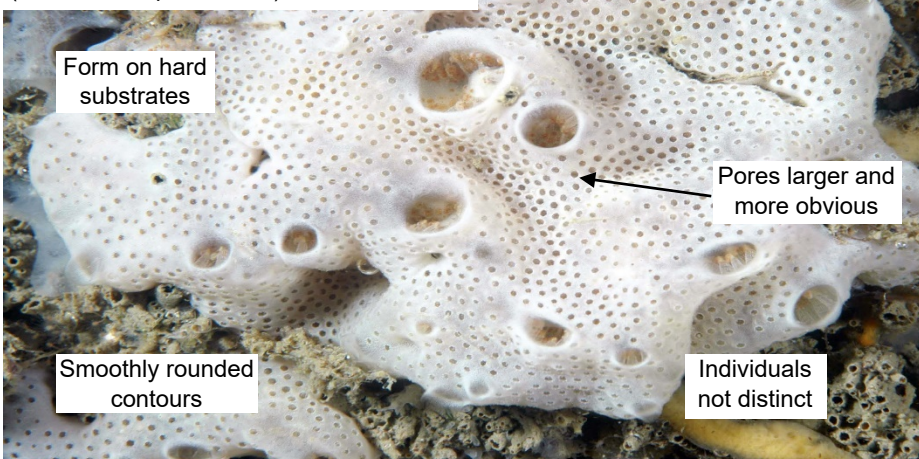
Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland – available at <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0020545709>

Check website for current distribution

Similar Species

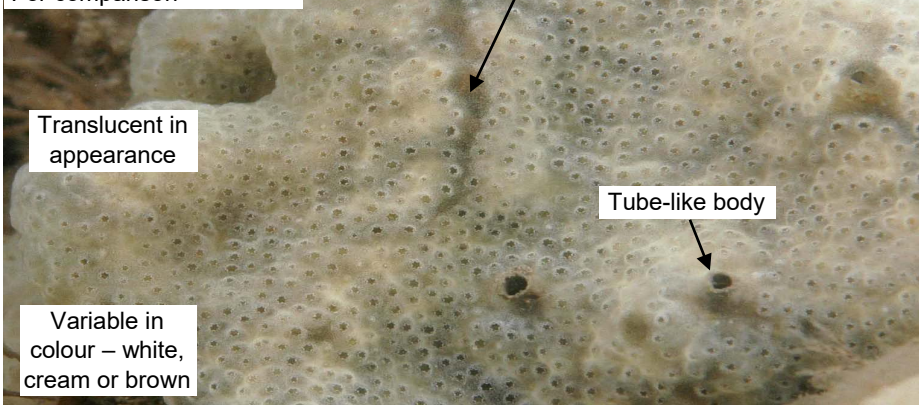
Other colony-forming sea squirts

Native
(*Lissoclinum perforatum*)



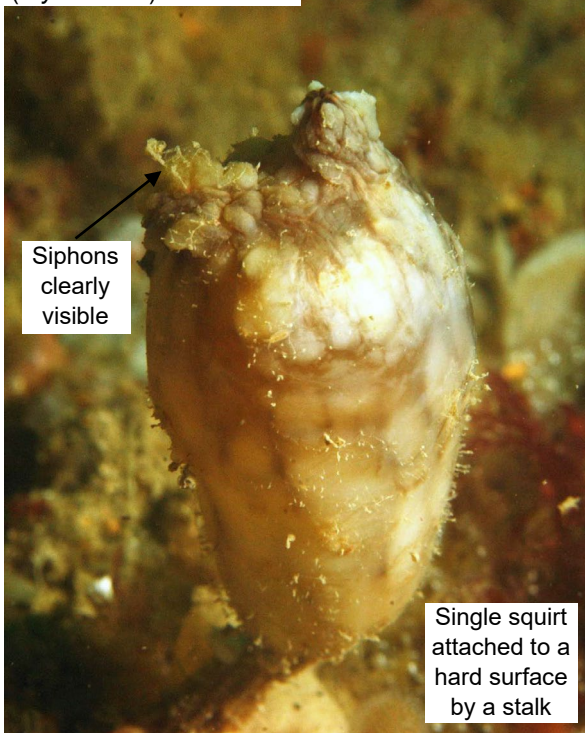
Didemnum vexillum

Invasive non-native
For comparison



Solitary Sea Squirts

Invasive non-native
(*Styela clava*)



References and further reading:

CABI datasheet *Homarus americanus* (American lobster) available at <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/79674>
Information brochure on the American lobster (Fisheries and Ocean Canada) available at <https://catalogue.ogsl.ca/en/dataset/e9d86c62-9cbb-4cd4-83a2-cff29e626090>

Photographs: Photos from: Gabrielle Wyn, Rohan Holt, Steve Trehwella

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

Adapted for Northern Ireland
Environment Agency 2020