



A Spectacle of Sea

TONY AND JENNY ENDERBY photograph the diverse creatures they call 'Butterflies of the Sea'.

Colourful Verco's nudibranchs, *Tambja verconis*, are usually found on bryozoans.

Between the orange sea squirts which cling to the reef wall, our dive lights reveal a green-and-yellow striped sea slug. Closer inspection identifies it as the ultimate nudibranch carnivore, *Roboastra luteolineata*, this one more than 10 centimetres long. It crawls rapidly, obviously hunting for prey but for the moment is unsuccessful.

The description 'sea slug' doesn't seem right for such a beautiful animal (see cover). The scientific name, Nudibranch seems far more appropriate. Yet these colourful creatures, found in many forms throughout New Zealand waters, are actually the marine equivalents of the garden slug — albeit often frilled and multi-coloured.

We find other sea slugs as we swim along the walls of the reef. As the marine growths change to the blue-green of the *Bugula* bryozoan, we find several blue-and-yellow

Verco's nudibranchs, *Tambja verconis*, feeding on it. Their spiralled, yellow egg masses are coiled nearby. A similar shaped, smaller green nudibranch and close relative, *T. affinis*, also feeds on the *Bugula*. Both species were oblivious to the danger from the approaching *Roboastra* their potential cannibal.

We were diving in Maroro Bay at the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve, one of the best places to see these animals. The *Tambja* species, arguably New Zealand's most colourful nudibranchs, are migrants from warmer waters, carried down by the East Auckland Current. The egg masses show they are breeding locally and could be around for another season or two.

On the rails of the sunken ship *Rainbow*



The Wellington nudibranch *Archidoris wellingtonensis*.

Warrior white tree-like hydroids protrude from the rails and hull. These *Solanderia* hydroids are home to the pink and white *Jason mirabilis* nudibranchs and their matching pink rosettes of eggs. The Jasons feed on the stinging polyps of the hydroids, storing them in the white cerata on their backs, using the stinging cells for their own protection. They are found right around the coast of New Zealand.