

COLLECTION, PRESERVATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF OPISTHOBRANCH MOLLUSCS

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ABSTRACT

The Opisthobranchia probably comprise about 5-6000 species of which 15-40% may be undescribed. Opisthobranchs are best collected by handpicking them off suitable substrates, e.g. sponges, bryozoans, cnidarians and seaweeds. Many opisthobranchs are conspicuously coloured; this disappears on preservation. Most opisthobranchs have soft bodies without a shell or with a thin, reduced, internal shell. Hence shell collections are inadequate for this group. Opisthobranchs should be relaxed prior to fixation. Most tropical species relax when placed on ice for a short period of time; ice crystals must not form. Standard fixation is in 4% neutral formaldehyde, and ethanol is used for permanent storage. The high proportion of undescribed species, and the lack of identification keys for the tropical Indo-Pacific region make identification of opisthobranchs difficult. Construction of a pictorial identification key, at least to family level, is in progress, and diagnoses of opisthobranch orders are given here.