



Domain	Eukaryota
Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Bryozoa

Bryozoans

480 MYA – PRESENT

Bryozoans are a group of aquatic invertebrate animals that live almost entirely in colonies. They feed by filtering food particles out of the water using a retractable crown of very fine tentacles called

a lophophore. Although the individual animals are commonly less than a millimetre long, bryozoan colonies can be as big as one metre across.

Fossil Record

The earliest fossils of bryozoans are found in rocks from the early Ordovician, and since then, they continue to be widespread in modern marine and freshwater environments.

Habitat and Lifestyle

Marine bryozoans live mostly in shallow tropical waters, but some are found in deeper water including in oceanic trenches, and others are found near the poles. One group lives entirely in fresh water. Many of the early fossil forms lived in distinct, columnar colonies, but now encrusting forms attached to rocks or other materials are more common. Some species are so abundant that they can cover almost every shell or rock in an area of sea floor.

Bryozoans can extend their soft body outside their chamber and sweep plankton and other microorganisms into their mouth using their lophophore. Their soft body and lophophore can be retracted into the chamber for protection.

Fossilisation

Bryozoan skeletons fossilise easily and are commonly found as casts and molds. Most limestones younger than 490 million years old are likely to contain some fossilised bryozoans.



Modern bryozoan, *Flustra foliacea*.
Image from gRuGo, Pixabay.



Branching bryozoan, *Stenopora sp.*, Permian (about 280 million years old), New South Wales.
Image from Jim Frazier.

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DID YOU KNOW

Bryozoans and other organisms are often responsible for biofouling of ships' hulls, docks, offshore structures, inside water pipes, and water tanks. In the case of ships and boats these growths need to be cleaned off regularly otherwise they can reduce the vessel's performance, slowing its speed and increasing its fuel consumption.

