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MARINE BIOTA OF THE MONTH - OCTOBER 2007



Stichopus chloronotus (Greenfish)

Western Australia's northern coastline is home to many weird and wonderful animals, including a rather slimy creature often referred to as a sea slug that is in fact not a slug at all. This slow moving individual is also known as a sea cucumber or holothurian.

Stichopus chloronotus (greenfish) are medium to large animals. Its body is continuous dark green with numerous elongate papillae, each tipped with orange. This species is usually found on sand or rubble of an outer reef flat. They are widely distributed in the waters of East Africa, Madagascar, the Indo-Pacific and Hawaiian Islands.

Greenfish feed on the rich organic film that coats sandy surfaces. They ingest large amounts of sand as they slowly crawl along the bottom, digesting the organic material and expelling the processed sand. The characteristic trails of expelled material can be seen in the image above (top left hand corner).

Holothurian numbers are in decline world-wide due to their high commercial value, and illegal poaching which is still being undertaken in prohibited areas. Some of the most threatened sea cucumber species include the sandfish, black teatfish and white teatfish, all of which are considered delicacies in Asian cuisine.