



Vertebrata lanosa

Common names: Wrack siphon weed, Truffle of the sea.
Irish name: Olann dhearg.

Phylum: Rhodophyta
Class: Florideophyceae
Order: Ceramiales
Family: Rhodomelaceae
Genus: Vertebrata
Species: V. lanosa



Fig 1. Plants of *Vertebrata lanosa*.

Morphology

- Red alga, up to 75 mm in length and tufty in appearance due to large numbers of fine branches that fork many times.
- Whole plant is dark purplish-red in colour, almost black when dried out.
- The main branches have a striped appearance while the branch tips are widely forked.
- It is attached to the host *Ascophyllum nodosum* and, more rarely, *Fucus vesiculosus*, by creeping rhizoids that penetrate the frond, mainly at points of damage.

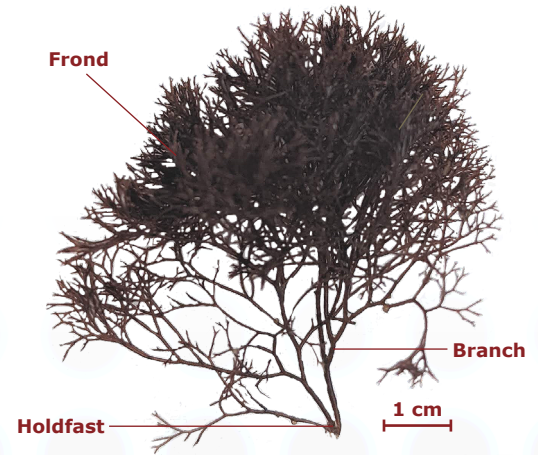


Fig 2. Morphology.

Reproduction

- *Vertebrata lanosa* has two macroscopic phases in the life-cycle (see LC1*). Male and female structures occur in different plants.



Fertile female and male reproductive structures occur at the tips of the branches.



Tetrasporophyte: This phase is morphologically the same as the male and females.

*Note: Life-cycle 1 (LC1) on page 3.



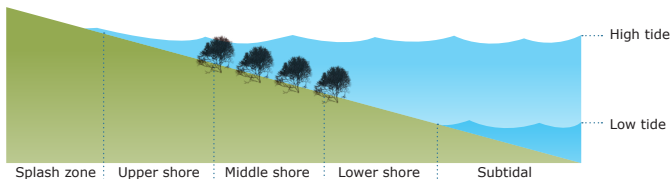
Fig 3. *Vertebra lanosa* attached to *Ascophyllum nodosum*.



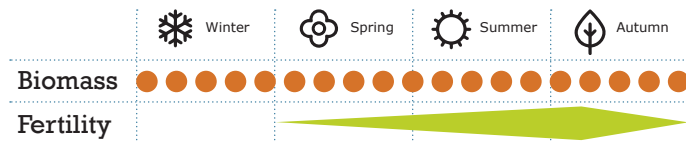
Vertebrata lanosa

Distribution and habitat

- It is found in the NE Atlantic (from the Arctic shores to Portugal and the N Sea) and NW Atlantic (from Arctic to New Jersey).
- It occurs almost exclusively as a hemiparasite within the thallus tissue of the large brown alga *Ascophyllum nodosum* which grows most abundantly in the mid-littoral zone in wave-sheltered rocky shores.



Seasonality



Note: These seasonal characteristics may vary slightly from year to year.

Wild resource and cultivation



interesting facts

- The harvesting of this seaweed is growing in popularity, particularly in Norway, because of its distinctive smell and taste, which in turn gives it one of its common names of 'Truffle of the Sea'.
- As a hemiparasite, *V. lanosa* is anchored into the frond of *A. nodosum*, gains some nutrition from its host, however it can still create its own food via photosynthesis.



- Although almost always found growing on *A. nodosum*, it can also occasionally be found on *Fucus vesiculosus*.
- It often has a parasite living within itself – another red alga called *Choreocolax polysiphoniae*.