

VI.4. BENTHIC FAUNA

VI.4a. The Bryozoa and Coelenterata

CLAUDE DEJOUX

The Bryozoa

The Bryozoa of Lake Titicaca, a minor component of the benthic fauna of this water body, are only known from the work of Marcus (1953) relating to material collected by the Percy Sladen Expedition of 1937, and which will be frequently cited in this book.

These rather unspectacular and usually small-sized organisms have rarely been collected and are not always capable of being identified. Identification is generally based on the structure of the statoblasts, but these organs are not always present in collected material.

Systematics and distribution

Only two species have been recorded from Lake Titicaca, or rather two subspecies of polyps with a much wider distribution either on a world scale or within South America.

Fredericella australiensis var. *browni* Rogick, 1945

The material studied by Marcus (1953) was recorded as being abundant and came from the Capachica region, where this species was found in small streams around the shoreline (under stones) as well as in the lake itself under pebbles along the shoreline or on the stems of *Schoenoplectus tatora*. Depending on their stage of growth, their age and type of substrate, the colonies can either form appressed grey-brown incrustations of 2 to 3 cm diameter, or the polyps can be erect and form a rather graceful feathery structure (Plate 1, Fig. 1 to 9).

The polyp tubes have a structure ranging from an elliptical form to a nearly triangular form. The mean size of polyps varies widely, the largest reaching 1.5 to 2.3 mm; the tentacles vary between 0.4 and 0.9 mm in length, and number between 24 and 27 per polyp. Statoblasts are numerous, but

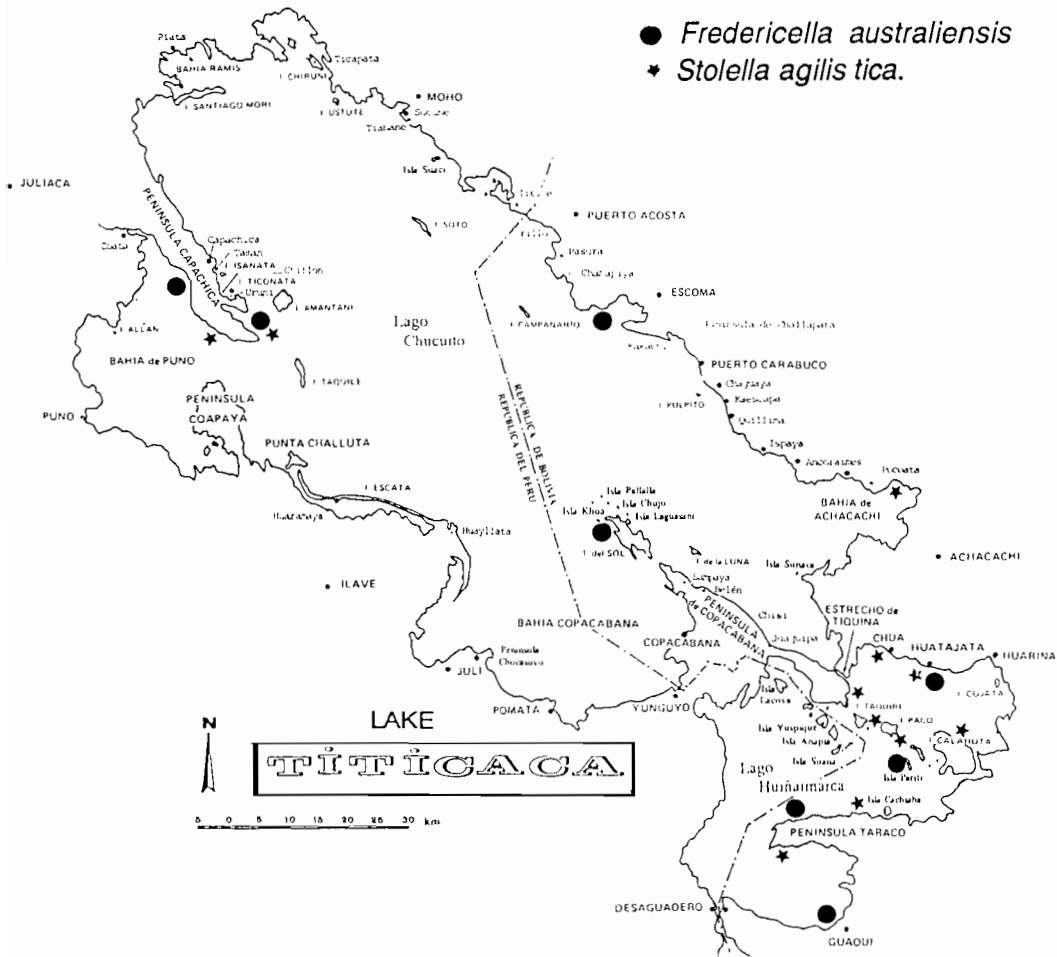


Figure 1. Known distribution of Bryozoa in Lake Titicaca.

flottoblasts are absent, a characteristic feature of the Fredericellidae. Marcus (*op.cit.*) named these non-floating statoblasts, ptioblasts.

Fredericella australiensis var. *browni* is a taxon very close to *Fredericella sultana*, but differs mainly by the greater diameter of the tubes in which dissepiments are absent, by the larger number of tentacles arranged in an elliptical rather than circular form and by its larger sessoblasts.

Fredericella australiensis is a cosmopolitan species recorded from Australia, Russia, the central Sahara and North America. The variety occurring in Lake Titicaca is distributed widely in the water body and has been recorded under stones or among vegetation on the shore of Lago Huñaimarca (Huatajata, Taquiri, Suana, Cojata, etc.) and in Lago Grande (Achacachi, Escoma, Copacabana, etc.) (Fig. 1). It should be noted that only isolated individuals

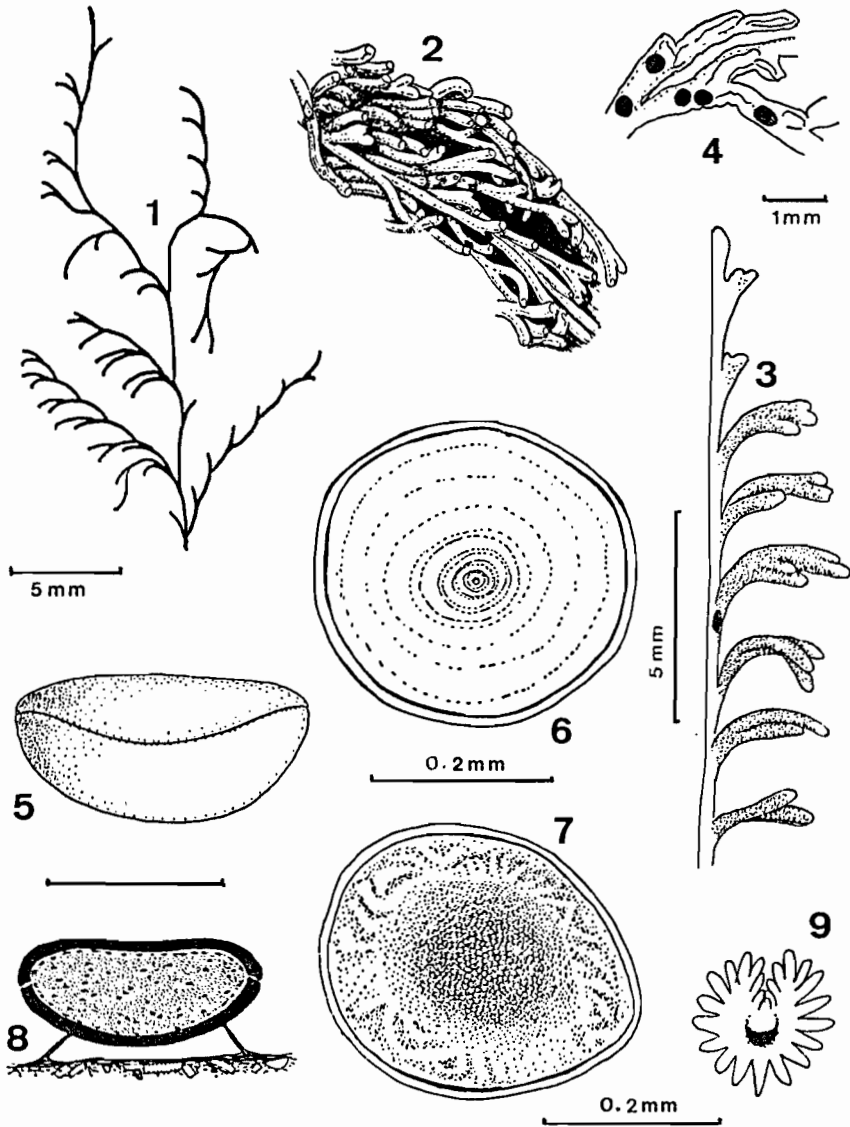


Plate 1. *Fredericella australiensis brownii*: 1. part of a colony growing on algae; 2. centre of an old colony growing on a rock; 3. detached branch of a polyptide with erect zooecia; 4. part of a cleared colony showing piptoblasts; 5. lateral view of a piptoblast; 6. upper valve of a piptoblast; 7. lower valve of a piptoblast; 8. section of a sessoblast; 9. crown of tentacles from a young polyptide. (From Marcus, 1953).

have been collected at these stations, giving the impression that this organism is rare.

Stolella agilis Marcus, 1942

Stolella agilis tica Marcus, 1953

The material collected comes mainly from macrophyte beds of *Elodea*, *Potamogeton* and *Myriophyllum* to which the polyps are attached. The colonies are often found encrusting shells of *Littoridina*. As with previous sub-species it has been recorded from the Capachica region.

The structure of the polyp is much more slender than in *Fredericella* (Plate 2, Figs 1 to 7). The polypides are grouped into clusters of 3 or 4 separated by septa and can break away from their attachment, probably in a stage of extension of the colony towards another substrate.

The tubes of zooecia are not angular but cylindrical with a diameter of 0.6 to 0.8 mm, the zooecia themselves being of very variable size. The ectocyst is thin and transparent with a diameter of 20 to 60 μm and showing two distinct layers in section (Plate 2, Fig. 6), the outside often being incrustated with debris and fragments of diatoms arranged in concentric lines.

The polyps have a very variable number of tentacles, difficult to count with certainty because of the folded form of the lophophore, but varying from 28 to 43 in the samples studied, with a mode of 35. The colonies contain few statoblasts and no sessoblasts.

The variety *Stolella agilis tica* appears to be a form intermediate between *Stolella agilis agilis* and *Stolella agilis iheringi*, differing in characters of size and shape, especially in the flottoblasts and by internal morphological characters of the endocyst and vestibulum. *Stolella agilis agilis* is a sub-species known only from South America (southern and central regions) whereas the sub-species *Stolella agilis iheringi* is only recorded from northern Brazil. In Lake Titicaca we have only found it once on the stems of *Myriophyllum* near Calahuta Island, which suggests that this subspecies is rarer than the previous one. In the material collected by the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition, the examples of *Stolella agilis tica* were collected in the Lagunilla Lagunilla lake situated to the west of Lake Titicaca, living at depths of between 12 and 24 metres. It is not impossible that these organisms also occur at the same depths in Lake Titicaca, despite the fact that we have never collected them ourselves at more than about 12 metres depth.

The coelenterata

Although very frequent in freshwaters, the South American Coelenterata, including both medusae and hydroids, have only been the subject of very few studies, restricted to taxa from the Amazon Basin (Schlenz, 1981).

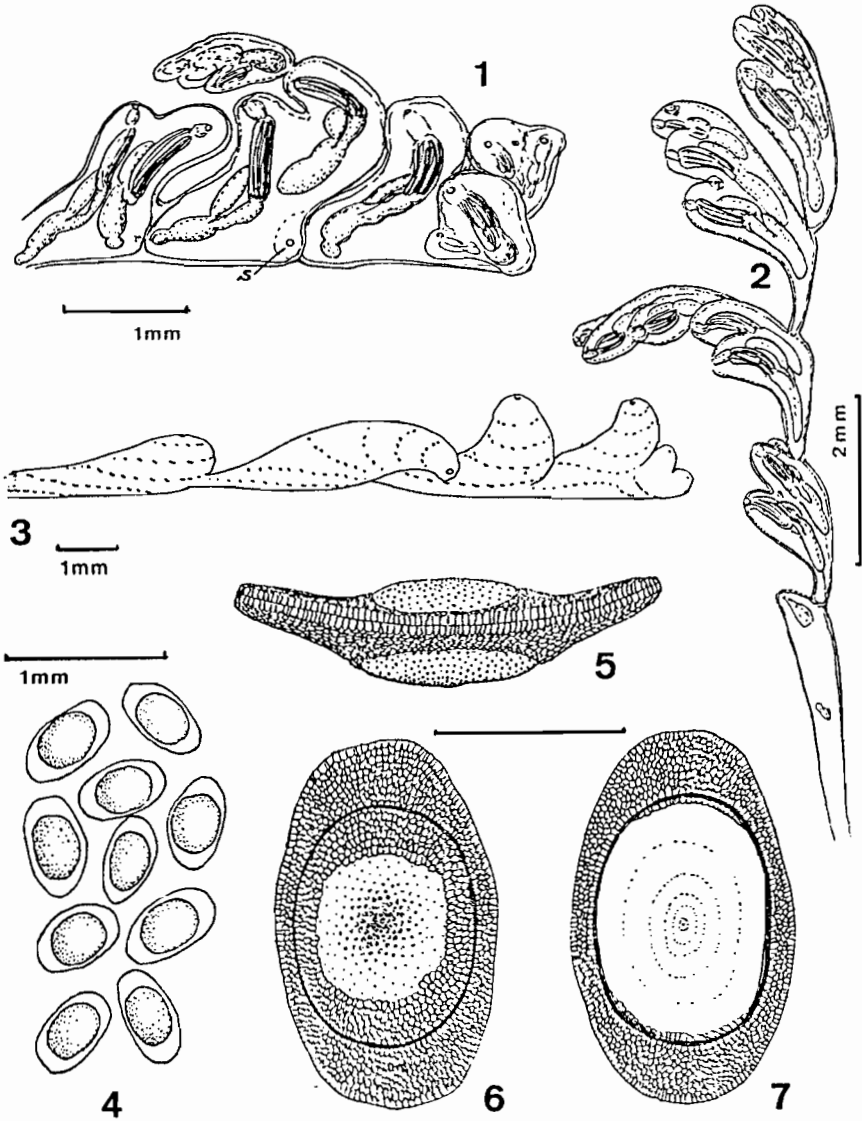


Plate 2. *Stolella agilis tica*: 1. isolated fragment of a colony showing septa; 2. extended part of a budding colony; 3. creeping branch of a polyp incrustated with foreign particles on its surface; 4. general appearance of flottoblasts treated with KOH; 5. lateral view of a flottoblast after KOH treatment; 6. view of upper surface; 7. view of lower surface. (From Marcus, 1953).

It seems highly probable that only one species of Coelenterata belonging to the genus *Hydra* occurs in Lake Titicaca, but it has not been possible to identify this to species level (Fig. 2). It is frequently present in our benthos samples and below we give a brief summary of its distribution in the Bolivian part of the lake.

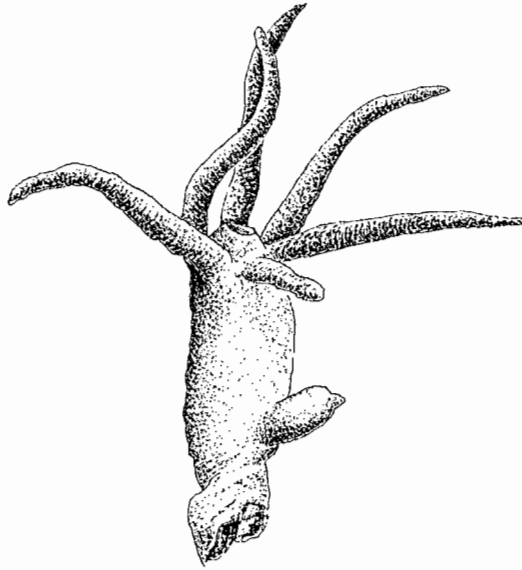


Figure 2. Polyp of *Hydra* sp. from Lake Titicaca.

Within this area the highest relative abundance (more than 33% of the benthic fauna in this zone) has been recorded on bare bottom substrates in Lago Huiñaimarca. This organism lives on compact sandy-silt substrates, at depths of thirty metres or more near the entrance to the Tiquina Strait and at lower abundance in the Chua Depression. Its presence in these localities is an argument in favour of the existence of deep-water currents, bringing oxygen and food. These are certainly two factors determining the abundance of *Hydra* that we have also found off the mouth of the Rio Suhez in Lago Grande (depth 8 to 15 m; % of total benthos: 20%).

Hydra sp. is a regular component of the fauna in areas covered with charophytes in Huiñaimarca and Lago Grande, where it represents 5 and 10% of the total macro-invertebrates present, respectively. Absolute densities exceeding 1500 individual per 10 g dry weight of these plants have been encountered on occasion, but densities of 400 to 500 are more frequent.

The *Hydra* sp. occurring in Lake Titicaca is small and of extremely low dry weight and therefore represent a negligible proportion of the biomass, but its nature as filter-feeding organism gives it a certain importance in the processes of organic matter transformation.

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