

Observation of a juvenile of the commercial species *Thelenota ananas*, in La Reunion, Indian Ocean

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Tropical sea cucumber juveniles are rarely observed *in situ*. However, it is vital to have information on their ecology so as to understand the phenomenon of recruitment, which is still very poorly known in this group of invertebrates.

Thelenota ananas is a fairly uncommon species on Reunion Island reefs. Isolated adult specimens have been seen occasionally but never in dense populations.

They are generally found on sandy bottoms at depths of more than 25 m (one specimen observed on 12/10/2008 on volcanic sand bottom off the coast of St Leu at a depth of 45 m in the area known as “Arche de Noé” – minimum length : 70 cm; another observed on 18/12/2008 on a volcanic slab at “La pointe au sel”, at a depth of 27 m). These different observations lead us to think that adults do not live in coral zones.

The photos of juveniles (Figs 2A and B) were taken at 3:30 p.m. on the 15th of January 2009 at a depth of 15 m in a relatively healthy coral zone near a sandy bottom, south of Pointe au sel (Saint Leu reef), in an area known as “Sec jaune”. The specimen measured about 14 cm in length. A photo of a juvenile of this species taken on a reef in New Caledonia was published by Conand (1981). This raises the question that while this species does not seem to be directly found on coral reefs in Reunion Island, it may need reefs for the development of its juveniles. It would be worthwhile, then, to confirm that adult specimens are really never found in coral zones and that juveniles can be found on coral reefs during the warm season.



Figure 1. Adult *Thelenota ananas* – depth: 45 m.



Figure 2. Dorsal (A) and ventral (B) views of a juvenile *Thelenota ananas*.