

Our Little Southern Visitor, *Acanthodoris rhodoceras*

By Kathy Johnson

Nudibranchs are some of my favourite critters, so when my husband and dive buddy Peter suggested we dive on Chup Point, I was unlikely to refuse. We run Rendezvous Dive Adventures, a lodge on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and this particular dive site is one of Barkley Sound's best for nudibranchs. Not just for the sheer number but also the variety: Orange-peel nudibranchs (*Tochuina tetraquetra*) the size of shoeboxes and tiny Three-coloured polycera (*Polycera tricolor*), Diamondback tritonia (*Tritonia festiva*), Clowns (*Triopha catalinae*), Striped (*Armina californica*), and our focus for the day, the Opalescent nudibranch (*Hermisenda crassicornis*) that in late May cover the reef like confetti.

We were approx. 12 m / 38 ft deep, crossing the sand and approaching the rockface of the reef when I saw something that stopped me mid-fin-kick. I thought it was a Nanaimo nudibranch (*Acanthodoris nanaimoensis*) cruising along the encrusting sponge but it didn't look quite right. The rhinophores were too long, the colouring too dark. There was a dark rim around the periphery of its body. It's not every day that one sees something completely new and I squealed into my regulator. Many photos were taken, some video shot. It wasn't until we returned home and looked it up that we realized we had seen a Black-tipped spiny doris (*Acanthodoris rhodoceras*).

This specimen was approx. 2.5 cm / 1 inch long and alone as far as we could tell. Normally they inhabit the coastline between Oregon and Mexico so this one was a very rare find for British Columbia. With further research we discovered that there was an observation in Alaska in 1970 and another in 1973, but this is the only reported sighting since. Researchers we've reached out to hypothesize that this nudi may have travelled in its larval stage on warm El Nino currents but don't think this is a range extension. It may, though, support the general northward shift of nudibranch species.

