

# Didemnid Sea Squirts

## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Didemnum* species

**AKA:** Chwistrell fôr (Welsh)

**Native to:** Not known

**Habitat:** Coastal areas on hard substrates up to 65 m below sea level

Immobile tube-like invertebrates occurring in colonies with an anterior inhalant and dorsal exhalant through which seawater is filtered for food. They are readily distinguished from other colonial sea squirts by their extensively lobed form. Colonies of *Didemnum* species have been reported to grow in sheets or mats which can be tan, cream, yellow, orange or pinkish in colour.

They have been introduced to British waters through a variety of pathways including aquaculture equipment, hull fouling and ship ballast water. Negative impacts are a result of colonies overgrowing and swamping other species and covering fish spawning grounds, aquaculture cages etc. While *Didemnum* sea squirts have been observed primarily colonising artificial substrates in harbours such as boats, submarine structures, pontoons and other human constructions, there are fears that natural reefs may become susceptible.

For details of legislation go to [www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation).

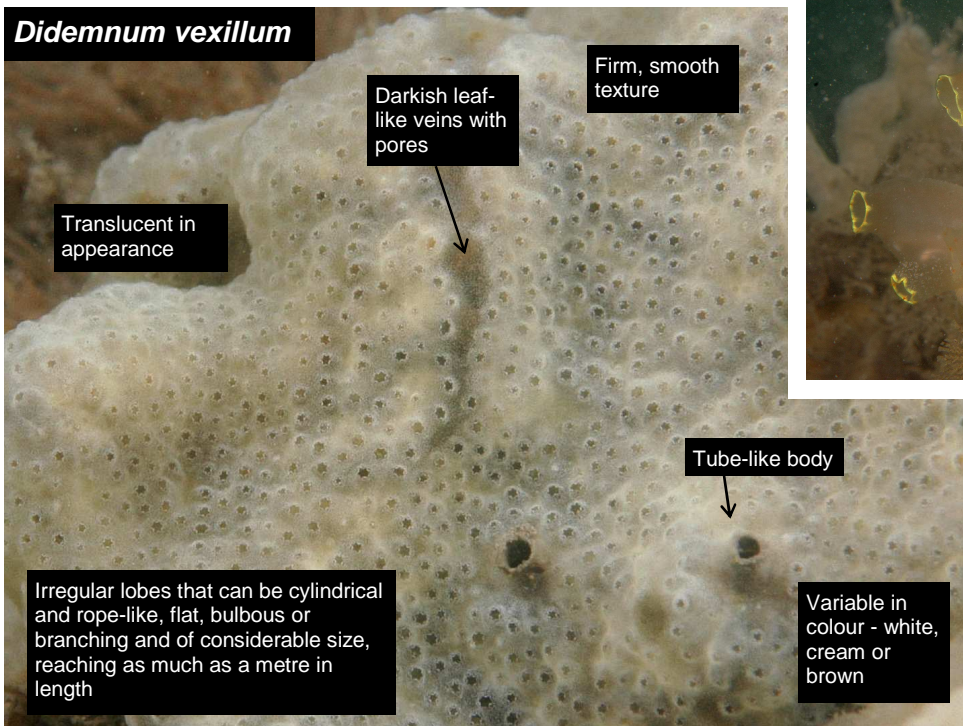
As this species has only been recently found in the UK a high level of vigilance is important. Therefore if found, please report to the Non-native Species Secretariat: [nss@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nss@fera.gsi.gov.uk)



*Didemnum vexillum* on *Styela clava*

## Key ID Features

### *Didemnum vexillum*



### *Didemnum vexillum* on *Ciona intestinalis*



*Didemnum vexillum* can be difficult to positively identify and requires expert advice if it is suspected to be present



# Identification throughout the Year

The appearance of *Didemnum vexillum* remains constant throughout the year.

# Field Signs

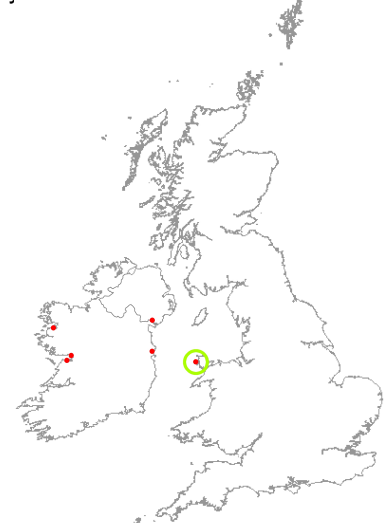
On hard substrates, they are common to depths below 30m and have been found down to 65m. They can tolerate temperatures from -2°C to 24°C, but have been collected only at salinities above 26 parts per thousand.



# Distribution

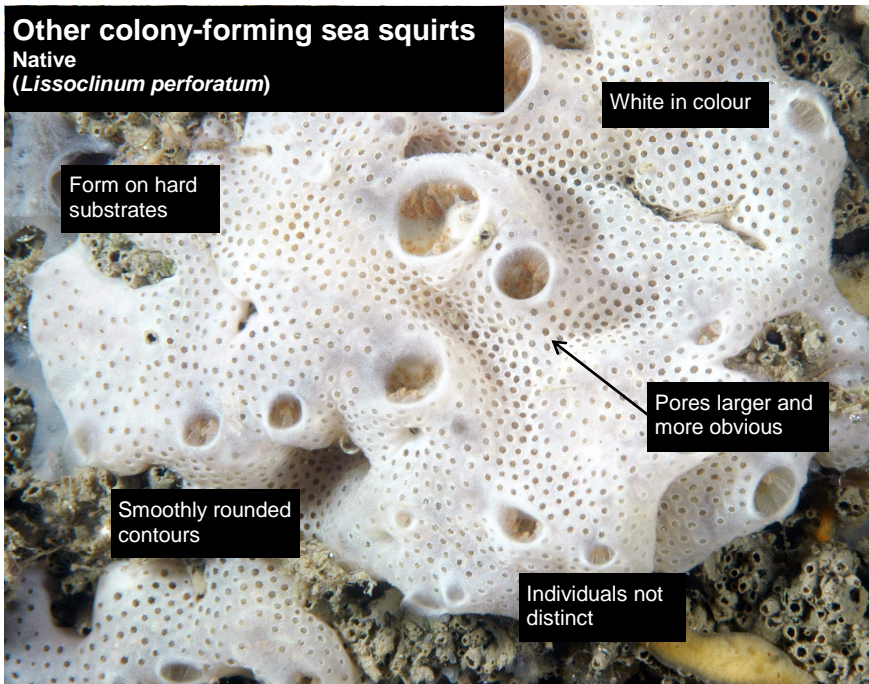
*Didemnum* sea squirts have been recorded at a limited number of sites in the UK, particularly in north Wales (see map).

Source: USGS Science Centre for Coastal and Marine Geology

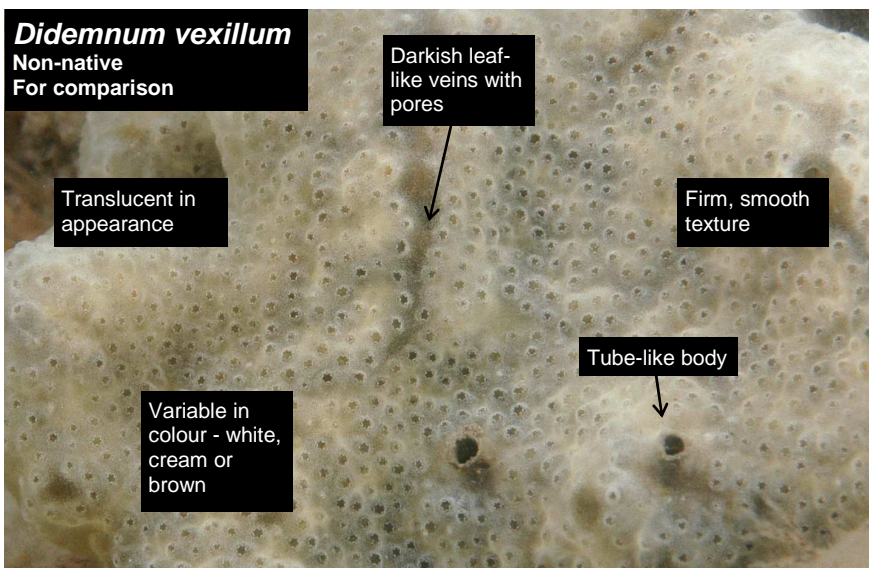


# Similar Species

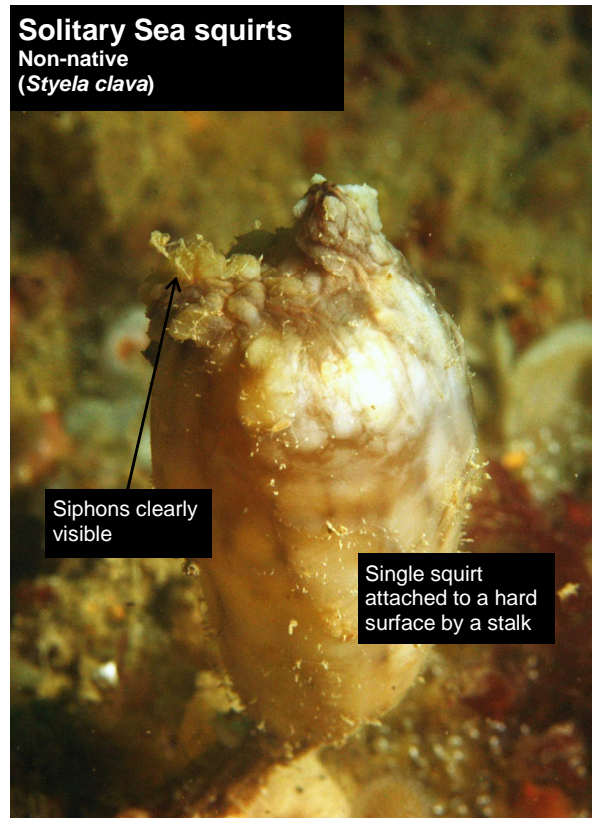
**Other colony-forming sea squirts**  
Native  
(*Lissoclinum perforatum*)



***Didemnum vexillum***  
Non-native  
For comparison



**Solitary Sea squirts**  
Non-native  
(*Styela clava*)



References and further reading:

USGS Science Center for Coastal and Marine Geology

<http://woodshole.er.usgs.gov/project-pages/stellwagen/didemnum/>

ISSG

<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=946&fr=1&sts=>