

Bryozoa: “Moss Animals” of the Sea



Bryozoa are one of the most abundant fossil species. At least 3,500 living species and 15,000 fossil species have been discovered throughout their 500-million-year history. Fossil bryozoans are most abundant in limestones, mudstones, and calcareous shales.

Known as “moss animals,” bryozoans are aquatic animals that live, for the most part, in colonies of individual organisms called zooids. Although hardly bigger than a comma on this page, thousands of zooids living together can form colonies many inches in diameter. Like corals, bryozoans secrete calcium carbonate to form the framework of the

colony. The shape of a colony depends on conditions of the sea bottom and of the water. Branching stemlike, lacy, massive, or encrusting forms are common.

Many bryozoans are valuable guides to the age of rocks where they are found. They lived in such great abundance that their fossilized remains play a key role in economic limestone deposits and help in interpreting ancient marine environments. Bryozoans are fascinating marine animals that provide geologists with valuable information for applied and scientific geologic studies.

