

NOTES ON THE FEEDING HABITS OF *IANTHINA JANTHINA*  
LINNAEUS

While engaged in studying the plankton off Waltair coast we came across a large number of the Siphonophore, *Porpita porpita* on 1-10-1958. One of them measuring 1.5 cms. had a single specimen of the pelagic gastropod *Ianthina janthina* attached to its under surface (Photomicrograph). In order to observe the curious nature of the association between these two animals, they were kept in a finger-bowl in clean sea water.



The *Ianthina* had firmly attached itself to the Siphonophore and did not detach even when disturbed. In the beginning the *Porpita* was bright blue in colour and exhibited quick movements of the dactylozooids etc. After a while the gastropod was seen to creep slowly and at the same time the water turned bluish pink in colour. The *Porpita* immediately ceased all its movements and remained still

with the tentacles stretched. On the same day a large number of *Ianthina* and *Porpita* were found washed ashore and amongst them another pair of the associates was obtained.

Observations on the food and feeding habits of *Ianthina* are few and there is no unanimity of views on the nature of its food or feeding behaviour. Laursen (1953) during the 'Dana' expedition, by dissection of various species, found remnants of Siphonophores, *Verella*, Haliobatidae, Copepods and in several cases embryos of Ianthinidae in the stomach and intestine and concluded that 'the Ianthinidae would take anything available.' Wilson and Wilson (1956) based on the observations of David (1954) on living specimens of *Ianthina janthina* aboard Discovery II state that 'While *Ianthina* is said to feed on a number of pelagic animals it appears to subsist mainly on *Verella*.' David observed the periodical exudation of a purple dye by the gastropod, while feeding and according to him the dye may be used to anesthetize the *Verella*. He adds that 'clean *Verella* floats were seen and taken, and may be all that *Ianthina* leaves of its food...' Our present observations indicate that *Porpita* may also constitute one of the major items of food for *Ianthina*. Since both the forms are holopelagic, with limited swimming power, it appears to us that there may not be any selective feeding on the part of the gastropod and that the selection is accidental when the predator comes into actual contact with the prey while both are drifting.

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