

Callochiton jeareyae

a little known South African Chiton

by Mike Els

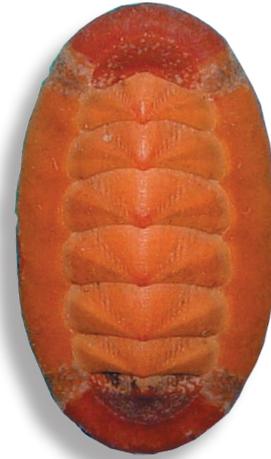


This small chiton was described in 1997 by Bruno Dell'Angelo and Constantine Mifsud from 4 specimens collected in various localities in the Eastern and South-Western Cape provinces of South Africa. Since its initial description, little information has been published on this species and relatively few collectors seem to be aware of its existence. It is however, an attractive and rather distinctive little species which I feel collectors should know of if they collect, or read about, our endemic species.

Of the 4 specimens used for description, 2 came from Algoa Bay, 1 from Cape St Francis and 1 from False Bay, Cape Town (although this locality was not marked on the distribution map accompanying the article). All were collected in 12 – 22m depth. The species was named after Mrs. Mariette Jearey, an experienced collector from Port Elizabeth, who collected 1 of the 4 specimens described. The specimen collected by her whilst Scuba diving was inside the aperture of a large dead *Charonia lampas pustulata* (Euthyme, 1889) found in 14m in Algoa Bay.

After reading the description, I spent time searching for this obscure little species and after several months of searching enjoyed finding it in the Eastern Cape. I have collected specimens in 14 – 22m depth from Algoa Bay to Cape St Francis. They seem fairly adaptable in habitat preference, varying from reef which is exposed to heavy surge action from the open ocean (although usually below 12m), to living on silty reef in the more sheltered confines of Algoa Bay.

It is a small species with the largest specimen found by myself to date measuring approximately 16mm dry. Most specimens are smaller, being 12mm or less. Coloration is variable, as with many Chitons, varying from orange through shades of purple to deepest red in varying combinations. By far the commonest colour in the Eastern Cape is the deep red form. An apparently constant character is the presence of a pale narrow bar traversing the girdle obliquely and bilaterally at each of the 2 poles which help in identifying this species almost at a glance when diving in poor light at depth where the intense red is only seen as a drab brown in the absence of a torch. The red specimens are indeed



striking when seen in sunlight fresh from the sea.

The range is from False Bay to Algoa Bay, but the eastern limit is as yet unknown. I would be interested to hear if any collectors have encountered this species east of Algoa Bay.

The illustrated live specimen is from 16m depth in western Algoa Bay. All illustrated specimens measure 12-15mm in length (dry).