GUIDE TO MARINE INVADERS IN THE GULF OF MAINE

Botrylloides violaceus
orange or red sheath tunicate

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
• Dense clusters of individual animals (zooids) sometimes forming extensive colonies
• Zooids (0.1in) arranged in loose circles, rows, or dense colonies
• Forms firm gelatinous covering; sometimes forms lobes
• Color variable: typically bright orange, red, or dull purple

HABITAT PREFERENCE
• Found primarily in the subtidal zone; occasionally in protected areas within the intertidal zone
• Attaches to submerged structures, algae, slow moving organisms
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**INVASION STATUS & ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS**

This tunicate is found throughout the entire coastline of the eastern United States. *Botrylloides violaceus* was probably introduced to the United States from its native home in the Northwest Pacific via ship fouling. Since its arrival in the 1970s, it has spread from Maine to Florida. It was also introduced to the British Isles, Norway, and the Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Black Seas. Like other colonial tunicates, it may grow over other organisms, possibly leading to the organism’s death.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**

At first glance, this colonial tunicate may look much like other encrusting marine animals, such as sponges. However, when examined under a microscope, you will see that they have the same structures as solitary tunicates (see diagram on right).

*B. violaceus* may look similar to orange or red sponges and other colonial tunicates such as *Didemnum vexillum* and *Botryllus schloeserri*. However, the texture of *B. violaceus* is more rigid than that of a sponge, and the zooids are arranged in a chain-like pattern, distinguishing it from other colonial tunicate species.

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This identification card is one of a series produced by Salem Sound Coastwatch (www.salemsound.org) highlighting introduced species that pose a threat to the marine environments of Massachusetts and the Gulf of Maine. The original development of these cards was funded by the MA EOEEA Office of Coastal Zone Management with funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For additional species information or to report sightings, please visit www.mass.gov/czm/invasives/monitor/reporting.htm.