



Lytechinus variegatus (Lamarck) (Echinodermata, Toxopneustidae), covering behavior

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The green sea urchin *Lytechinus variegatus* (Lamarck, 1816) is commonly found in inshore shallow-water areas where it usually occurs alone on sandy bottoms (Hill & Lawrence 2003). Frequently, this species can adorn itself with debris in a so-called 'covering behavior' (Millott 1955, Verling *et al.* 2004). Much controversy surrounds the significance of this behavior, but it may provide protection against predators or against physical factors such as light and temperature, thus avoiding body desiccation (see Verling *et al.* 2004). On December 08th 2006 at 11:20, a 12 cm total length specimen of *L. variegatus* was observed covered by the brown seaweed *Dictyota* sp. and a terrestrial angiosperm on a rocky shore of Ilha Grande, Angra dos Reis-RJ, Brazil at a depth of 1.5 m. This behavior has great ecological importance, since it may help in the dispersal of marine, estuarine and even terrestrial plants attached to its back. Since the wave action is considerably strong on rocky shores (Nybakken & Bertness 2004), these plants may leave the sea urchin spines and occasionally establish themselves on a favorable sheltered place. Picture Characteristics: Sony® DSC-N1; Resolution of 8.1 megapixels (300 dpi); diaphragm aperture F/4; time of exposition 1/640; Speed ISO-64.

References

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