

**Book review: BIOGENIC FORMATIONS  
IN THE SLOVENIAN SEA**authors: Lovrenc Lipej, Martina Orlando-Bonaca,  
Borut MavričNational Institute of Biology, Marine Biology  
Station Piran, 2016, 206 pp.ISBN 978-961-93486-4-2. Printed within the Med-  
KeyHabitats Project, RAC/SPA Hardback: 20 €  
(orders: information@mbss.org)

Marine biologists are increasingly being compelled to discover and expound upon ever more remote and inaccessible habitats, ever more exotic species and their behaviors. The public wants to see faraway coral reefs, open ocean feeding frenzies with tunas, sharks and whales, or read about giant squid and deep-sea “monsters”. But let’s face it, most marine biologists are paid to make do with what lies directly outside their labs and institutions. Of course, these “front yards” are often exciting enough in their own right. This book and the habitats it describes are a case in point. Even Slovenia, with its ca. 45-km-long coastline, can boast an array of habitats that has kept generations of marine biologists busy over their entire careers.

The habitats presented here are “biogenic formations”. Although such formations are well known elsewhere (think coral reefs), the northern Adriatic Sea has traditionally been better known for its soft-bottom seafloor. Only fairly recently has sufficient recognition been given to the unique macrofauna on these muddy bottoms and its aggregation into biogenic structures termed bioherms or multi-species clumps.

This book is intriguing because it presents less well known types of biogenic formations such as “trezze” and “tegnue”, pre-coralligenous, coralligenous and the stony coral *Cladocora caespitosa* - the closest you’ll get to a “coral reef” in the Mediterranean. These are interesting because hard substrata play a major role in evolution and paleoecology. Especially meter-scale biogenic formations associated with cold seeps (called tegnue along the Venetian coast and trezze in the Gulf of Trieste) are increasingly recognized as important for the history of life. The Mediterranean coralligene is nicely developed in several community stages in the northern Adriatic. In its mature stage it consists of sciaphilic communities of coralline red algae, sponges, corals and bryozoans. Depending on the size and diameter of the colonies, these “reefs” serve as a habitat for a wide range of invertebrates, most notably molluscs, polychaetes and crustaceans. Because all these biogenic constructions are also colonized by sessile and cryptic fauna, they are exceptional diversity hotspots. Of special interest in this respect along the Slovenian coasts are two larger formations of dead Mediterranean stony corals that the authors highlight.

The second half of the book is devoted to a field-guide-like presentation, based on color photographs, of the inhabitants of these biogenic formations. This “Biodiversity Overview” includes the flora, the major invertebrate groups and bony fishes. It is admirably introduced by short texts on a range of ecological subtopics such as antipredator strategies (camouflage, mimicry, mutualism) and insights into cryptobenthic habitats and “real” and “false” cryptobenthic fauna. This book addresses the general public but is an equally nice compilation for the expert’s library. It would have benefited from somewhat more rigorous editing, but this does not detract from the delightful and informative reading experience.

The book is dedicated to two young Slovenian colleagues working at the marine biology station who died in a criminally negligent diving exhibition, underlying that our conquest of the sea remains a perilous adventure despite - or in this case even due to - the newest and most fashionable equipment.

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