

## *Mysterious "Blob" (Bryozoa)*

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Bryozoans are generally considered a sign of good water quality, and normally aren't a problem.

Bryozoans are among the most abundant freshwater invertebrates that are found attached to submerged surfaces. Commonly known as "moss animals," these tiny colonial organisms live in aquatic environments where they feed on diatoms, green algae, bacteria, rotifers, protozoa, and even an occasional tiny crustacean or nematode. Like the corals, these sessile creatures were thought to be plants until the mid-1700s.



The majority of bryozoans are marine (several thousand species), but one class, the Phylactolaemata, is found exclusively in fresh water. *Pectinatella magnifica*, one species belonging to this class, is commonly found in freshwater lakes and rivers in North America. Most people call them "jelly blobs" or just plain "blobs" given their appearance. Each colony is a collection of genetically identical organisms (zooids) that exude a protective matrix, a gelatin-like substance made mostly of water, firm but slimy to the touch.



The surface appears divided into rosettes, each containing 12-18 zooids. Massive colonies may exceed two feet (60 centimeters) in diameter and contain upwards of two million zooids, although more typical sizes are one foot or less. Colonies form on submerged logs, twigs, and even wooden docks. Brought to the surface, jelly blobs exude a pungent aroma that may be

linked to chemicals released by the organisms to inhibit fish predation or reduce competition for growing space. Few other organisms are willing to grow next to the magnificent jelly blob.

Here are a couple sites with pictures and info on bryozoans:

A good site with pictures and descriptions:

<http://www.bio.umass.edu/biology/conn.river/bryozoa.html>

A site that covers the class of freshwater bryozoans:

<http://www.civgeo.rmit.edu.au/bryozoa/famsys.html#Phylactolaemata>

Another decent web picture of a freshwater bryozoan:

<http://www.civgeo.rmit.edu.au/bryozoa/phylactolaemata/pectinatellidae/pectmag.jpg>