

There are two forms of Velella. California specimens have a sail which is angled to the right of the main axis. This means that as the wind pushes it along, Velella tacks as much as 60 degrees to the right of the true wind direction. Our predominant wind is from the northwest, therefore these animals are usually kept offshore. However occasionally there is a southwesterly wind which drives millions to certain death. Our recent storms have also brought Velellas to our beaches.

"Even though Velellas are very common and distributed throughout the oceans of the world, very little is known about the details of their life. The reproductive polyps apparently bud off small medusae (miniature jellyfish-like structures) somewhere in the middle of the ocean. The medusae sink to depths of over 7,000 feet and grow gonads which produce sperm or eggs. Fertilization occurs in the dark abyss. The small young develop a float, secrete gas into it and rise slowly thousands of feet to the surface. Here they glide along feeding on animal plankton that they sting with specialized cells (located on the tentacles) called nematocysts."