

First record of the family Coralliidae (Cnidaria: Anthozoa: Octocorallia) from the western South Atlantic, with a description of *Corallium medea* Bayer, 1964

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Abstract

Specimens of precious coral obtained on oceanic seamounts off Brazil, at depths between 380 and 500 m, constitute the first record of the family Coralliidae in the South Atlantic. Colonies were identified as *Corallium medea* Bayer, 1964. One specimen was found associated with the deep-water reef forming scleractinian coral *Lophelia pertusa* (Linnaeus, 1758). In the Straits of Florida, *C. medea* is a quite common species in deep-water coral banks, which are partly dominated by *L. pertusa*. It is suggested that it will be found in deep coral reefs where *L. pertusa* has been recorded, 300 km from the oceanic bank where it was found in Brazil,

Key words: Cnidaria, Coelenterata, Octocorallia, Coralliidae, *Corallium medea*, Precious coral, Brazil, South Atlantic

Introduction

Species of *Corallium* Cuvier, 1798, are commonly named “precious coral” or “red coral”, and are valued for jewellery. There is a large industry around the world to exploit their commercial value. The retail industry in Hawaii alone was valued at over 25 million dollars per year in the early 1990’s (Grigg 1994).

Corallium has 30 extant species. Kükenthal (1924) lists 16 species, and since then Bayer has described 13 new species (Bayer 1955, 1956, 1964, 1996) and assigned another to the genus (Bayer 1993).

Six species were previously reported from the North Atlantic and/or the Mediterranean: *Corallium rubrum* (Linnaeus, 1758); *C. johnsoni* Gray, 1860; *C. maderense* (Johnson, 1899); *C. tricolor* (Johnson, 1899); *C. medea* Bayer, 1964; and *C. niobe* Bayer,