



Sipunculans of the Caribbean coast of Venezuela and Curaçao

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Abstract

All sipunculan species currently known to occur on the Caribbean coast of Venezuela and Curaçao are reviewed. Included are species previously reported in the primary literature and those collected by Cutler (EBC) in 1987/1988 and Hernández-Ávila (IHA) in 2003/2004. Nineteen species of sipunculans belonging to eleven genera are known from this region. Most specious is the genus *Aspidosiphon* with seven species and the genus *Phascolosoma* with three species.

Key words: Sipuncula, faunal list, Caribbean

Introduction

The sipunculans, a phylum of unsegmented worm-like organisms, are mainly deposit feeders. They may be found in most marine habitats and are usually found in some sort of burrow or crevice presumably leading to the possession of an anteriorly situated, dorsal anus. They possess an extensible introvert with variously developed distal tentacles utilized in food gathering. The introvert may also be armed with hooks arranged in rings or scattered over the surface. Additionally, the epidermis may possess various structures such as fleshy papillae, cuticular hooks and hardened shields in the anal region.

There have been few studies of the sipunculans of the Caribbean coast of Venezuela and Curaçao although Cutler & Cutler (1989) and Cutler & Cutler (1990) examined several specimens collected in 1987/1988 from these waters as well as some of the specimens collected by Rice (1975). As part of a project to understand the biodiversity of Cubagua Island, one of us (IHA) collected numerous specimens of sipunculans from the rocky intertidal zone. It was decided that a list of known sipunculan species collected from Venezuela and nearby Curaçao would be beneficial to future workers. To that end we present here a list of the sipunculans collected by Cutler (EBC) in 1987/1988 and by Hernández-Ávila (IHA) in 2003/2004 from the rocky intertidal coasts of Venezuela and Curaçao. We also review all previously published reports of sipunculans collected in Venezuela and Curaçao and make numerous nomenclatural updates of species cited in previous works (ten Broeke 1925, Rice 1975). Hopefully, this list will aid in further identifications and stimulate further interest in this often neglected component of the benthos.

Material and methods

Voucher specimens of material collected by Cutler and Hernández-Ávila have been deposited in the Museum of Comparative Zoology collections.