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Mexicope sushara sp. nov., the first New Zealand record of the isopod crustacean family Acanthaspidiidae (Asellota)

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Abstract

Mexicope sushara sp. nov. is recorded from southeastern New Zealand coastal waters, the first record of the genus from the Pacific and the first record of the Acanthaspidiidae from New Zealand. The species is from the continental shelf, taken in association with a bryozoan colony at a depth of 80 metres on the Otago Shelf, southeastern South Island. The distinguishing characters are a rostral spine and prominent and acute pre-ocular lobes; these characters in conjunction with stalked eyes separate the species from all others in the family.

Key words: Asellota, Acanthaspiidae, *Mexicope*, New Zealand, southwest Pacific

Introduction

The Acanthaspidiidae is a primarily deep-water Southern Hemisphere family with apparent high representation in the Southern Ocean and Antarctic waters (Brandt 1991, 1994, 2001; Just 2001). The family contains three genera, *Acanthaspidia* Stebbing, 1893, *Ianthopsis* Beddard, 1886, and the more recently described *Mexicope* Hooker, 1985 which was known only from the Caribbean until the description of a second species, *Mexicope westralia* Just, 2001, from southern Western Australia.

Just (2001) suggested that *Mexicope* would likely have had an ancestral Tethyan distribution, and that the genus 'should be looked for in tropical and subtropical waters of the Indo-West Pacific.' The discovery of the third species of *Mexicope* from the decidedly temperate waters off the southeastern coast of New Zealand's South Island is a considerable range extension for the genus, and reinforces the probable Southern Ocean and Gondwanan origins of this family. Of the described species of Acanthaspidiidae, 83% are known from the Southern Hemisphere, and 57% (Kensley *et al*. 2004) can be considered

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