

***Mesosignum weddellensis* sp. nov. (Crustacea: Asellota: Mesosignidae), a new isopod species from the abyssal Weddell Sea, Antarctica**

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Abstract

Mesosignum weddellensis sp. nov. is described from the abyssal Weddell Sea, Antarctica. This is the second record of *Mesosignum* from the Southern Ocean, the other known species being *M. antarcticum* Schultz, 1979. *Mesosignum brevispinis* Birstein, 1963 from the Pacific Ocean is the most similar species. The most significant difference is the length of the seventh pereonite, which is only half as long as the other pereonites in *M. brevispinis*, while in *M. weddellensis* it is as long as the other pereonites.

Keywords: Isopoda, *Mesosignum*, deep sea, Antarctica, Southern Ocean, taxonomy, new species

Introduction

The family Mesosignidae was established by Schultz, 1969. The genus *Mesosignum* Menzies, 1962 was regarded as incertae sedis at the time of description (Menzies 1962), Wolff (1962: 62, 63) was equally uncertain and tentatively including it in the Munnidae, but excluding it from the generic key to the family. Birstein (1963) agreed with Wolff (1962), but placed the genus in the subfamily Pleurogoniinae. Fourteen species of *Mesosignum* are known, but many of these are poorly characterised and in need of redescription. The Pacific Ocean, where nine species of *Mesosignum* occur, holds the greatest diversity within this genus at present. *Mesosignum* has a known depth range from the continental rise to the bathyal depths, all but one recorded at depths from 3500–6500 m, with *M. vitjazi* Birstein, 1963 at the greatest recorded depth of 7954 m (see species list of *Mesosignum*, Table 1).