Calathiscus tantillus, a new genus and new species of scleractinian coral (Scleractinia, Poritidae) from the Gulf of Oman

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Abstract

Calathiscus tantillus new genus & new species (Scleractinia, Poritidae) is described from several specimens collected along the north coast of the Sultanate of Oman and Masirah Island. The zooxanthellate genus has a massive growth form, although colonies remain very small (< 40 mm). The skeletal characteristics are intermediate between Porites and Goniopora, with calices averaging 1.7 mm in diameter. The polyps, fully extended during the day in most specimens, have a long tubular column topped by a wide conical oral disc surrounded by 15–22 tentacles. The characteristics of this new species and genus are discussed in relation to other genera in the family: Porites, Goniopora, Stylarea, Alveopora and Poritipora.

Key words: Coelenterata, Cnidaria, Scleractinia, Poritidae, new species, new genus, Indian Ocean, Gulf of Oman, coral, coral reef

Introduction

Poritid corals form the framework of most coral communities of northern Oman (Sheppard and Salm 1988). Several massive and branching species of Porites dominate the upper part of the reef and scattered, sometimes large, colonies of various species of Goniopora occupy the lower and the most protected sections of the reef.

Small colonies of an unidentified Goniopora-like scleractinian coral, were observed and photographed in the field. Specimens where collected and compared to existing genera and species in this family.: Alveopora, Goniopora, Stylarea, Poritipora and Porites. Because of their characteristic polyp morphology and the unique structure of their skeleton, these specimens were attributed to a new genus and species. This series of coralla form a very distinct, although small, group which has skeletal structures intermediate between Goniopora and Porites, but polyp aspect similar to that of Goniopora and Alveopora.