

## New species of the gorgonian genus *Pacifigorgia* (Coelenterata: Octocorallia: Gorgoniidae) from Pacific Panama

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### Abstract

Four new shallow water species of the genus *Pacifigorgia* were found in recent surveys along the Pacific coast of Panama. One of the species was only found in dense patches at two shallow sea-mount-like localities inside the Coiba National Park, Gulf of Chiriquí. Two other species were patchily distributed at several localities in the Gulf of Chiriquí. A fourth species was widely distributed around the gulfs of Chiriquí and Panama encompassing a broad range of habitats and depths. The new species are described and illustrated in detail with scanning electron micrographs (SEM) of the sclerites, and colour photographs of the colony forms. The suspected occurrence of a particular *Pacifigorgia* species for this region is confirmed and two other new records are added to the species list. With the new four species, a total of 15 are established for Panama, making 31 species for the eastern Pacific to date.

**Key words:** Cnidaria, Coelenterata, eastern Pacific, gorgonians, Gorgoniidae, octocorals, *Pacifigorgia*, Panama, soft corals, coral reefs, new species

### Introduction

The genus *Pacifigorgia* Bayer, 1951 (Gorgoniidae) is one of the most diverse and abundant shallow water octocoral taxa along the eastern Pacific with 27 known species, a large number of which occur in Panama (Breedy & Guzman 2002, 2003a, 2003b). Historically, the taxonomy of *Pacifigorgia* from Panama has changed: Verrill (1868) described four species under the genus *Leptogorgia*; Hickson (1928) reported seven species under the genus *Gorgonia*; Bayer (1951) identified one more in establishing the genus *Pacifigorgia*; and later, Breedy & Guzman (2002) recognised five of these twelve species as valid for the genus. The species which were the subject of the previous studies came from undeter-