

***Acropora rongelapensis* sp. nov., a new species of *Acropora* from the Marshall Islands (Scleractinia: Astrocoeniina: Acroporidae)**

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ABSTRACT

A new coral species, *Acropora rongelapensis*, from the northern central Pacific Ocean is described. On present records, this species appears to be endemic to the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Distinguishing features of the species include sub-flattened branches with widely separated radial corallites born laterally. Diagnostic characters of the new species place it within the *Acropora loripes* group.

Key words: Cnidaria, Anthozoa, Scleractinia, *Astrocoeniina*, *Acroporidae*, Marshall Islands, Central Pacific

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Acropora* (Oken, 1815) was revised worldwide by Wallace (1999) and a neotype for the type species *Acropora muricata* was created. Veron (2003) added 16 new species and Veron (2000) reinstated several species out of synonymy. The species herein described was collected from a deep lagoonal habitat at Rongelap Atoll, one of the most northerly atolls on the Ralik archipelago island chain in the Marshall Islands. In the main treatise on Marshall Island corals (Wells, 1954), 10 species of *Acropora* are recorded from trawl grabs at Rongelap Atoll. None of the available species names covered in the above treatments appears to cover the present material, which is herein recognized as a new species. In a recent survey, 87 sites were surveyed across four of thirty atolls in the Marshall Islands (Rongelap, Bikini, Ailinginae, Mili), however this species was only located at one survey site.