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Amphimedon species (Porifera: Niphatidae) from the Gulf of Aqaba, Northern Red Sea: Filling the gaps in the distribution of a common pantropical genus

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Abstract

Amphimedon (Porifera, Demospongiae, Haplosclerida, Niphatidae), a pantropical genus of reef and mangrove sponges, was recently recorded for the first time from the Red Sea suggesting a rarity which is not sustained by new reef surveys in the Gulf of Aqaba. Here we describe four species of *Amphimedon* occurring commonly in the Gulf of Aqaba. Among these, three are new to science, *A. dinae* sp.nov., *A. jalae* sp.nov. and *A. hamadai* sp.nov., the fourth one has been recently described as *A. chloros* Ilan et al., 2004. Although the latter species and our three new species are the first definite *Ampimedon* species recorded from the Red Sea, at least one previously described sponge from the region, *Ceraochalina ochracea* Keller, 1889 is suspected to belong to this genus as well. The status of the described and suspected Red Sea *Amphimedon* is discussed and compared to species recorded from neighbouring Indian Ocean waters.

Key words: Demospongiae, Haplosclerida, Niphatidae, *Amphimedon*, new species, Gulf of Aqaba, Red Sea

Introduction

This study describes four common species from the Gulf of Aqaba, Northern Red Sea, as a contribution to increase our poor knowledge of the taxonomy of sponges in that area. Sponges are common and important elements of reef and mangrove communities in the Red Sea and have been demonstrated to contain interesting natural products (Blunt & Munro, 2004). Haplosclerid sponges feature prominently among reef dwelling sponge taxa and are also known to contain several distinct types of compounds such as alkylpyridines and acetylenic acids (Andersen *et al*., 1996; Van Soest et al., 1998). The genus *Amphime-*

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