

***Aplysina chiriquiensis*, a new pedunculate sponge from the Gulf of Chiriquí, Panamá, Eastern Pacific (Aplysinidae, Verongida)**

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Abstract

A new pedunculate aplysinid sponge, *Aplysina chiriquiensis*, is described from shallow waters (1.5–35 m) in the Gulf of Chiriquí, western Panamá, Eastern Pacific. The species *chiriquiensis* is a common component of coral reefs and soft coral reefs in that region. After examining the systematic status of related taxa we conclude that there are only two valid taxa of stalked *Aplysina*, *A. bathyphila* Maldonado and Young from the Caribbean, and our new species from the eastern Pacific. *A. chiriquiensis* is a yellow to purplish, stalked and branching sponge with oscules arranged in one or more rows along the branches. The branches can be cylindrical with smooth tapering ends, or stubby and laterally compressed. *A. chiriquiensis* is the first *Aplysina* species described from Panamá, and its distribution elsewhere in tropical and subtropical Eastern Pacific has yet to be evaluated.

Key words: *Aplysina*, taxonomy, new species, Porifera, Eastern Pacific Ocean

Introduction

The family Aplysinidae Carter, 1875 (order Verongida) comprises massive, tubular, or ramose sponges with a skeleton of pithed, amber-colored fibers forming a regular reticulum of polygonal meshes without specialized arrangement near the sponge surface (Bergquist and Cook, 2002). Most aplysinids are yellow to green, brown, or purple in life