

Two new species of jellyfishes (Cnidaria: Cubozoa: Carybdeida) from tropical Western Australia, presumed to cause Irukandji Syndrome

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Abstract

Two new jellyfishes are described from the waters off northwestern Australia. The first, *Carukia shinju* n. sp., is similar to the common Queensland Irukandji *Carukia barnesi*, but differs from the latter in having a larger body size, branched velarial canals, nematocyst warts on both the velarial canals and the perradial lappets, fully-spined tentacular nematocyst shafts, about 14 naked ringlets between adjacent tentacular nematocyst bands, and long, narrow, capitate rhopalial horns. The second, *Malo maxima* n. gen. n. sp., is distinctive from other known cubozoan species by its unique combination of having a tall, narrow, robust body with a flattened apex; frown-shaped rhopalial niche ostia; short, broad, straight rhopalial horns; small, narrow pedalia with a single row of nematocyst patches on the outer keel and fine, cylindrical unmodified tentacles; moderately developed perradial mesenteries; 4 simple to bifurcated velarial canals per octant arising from a single base; and lacking both gastric phacellae and a thorn-like diverticulum of the pedalial canals. Both species are thought to be dangerous to humans, causing Irukandji syndrome.

Key words: Cubozoa, Carybdeida, Irukandji syndrome, box jellyfish, Western Australia

Introduction

Irukandji syndrome has troubled the pearling industry in the Broome area of Western Australia for as long as anyone can remember. Long ago, they did not have a name for the sickness, and it was seen as the mark of a man to grit one's teeth through the experience (various pearl divers and skippers, pers. comm. 2004). The official name and classification of the species mattered not, for the divers all knew which jellyfish to look out for (and they