

A new species of the genus *Botryllus* (Ascidiacea) from the Red Sea

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Abstract

A new ascidian species was discovered during a study of the ecology of ascidians off the Red Sea coast of Israel. This species has been provisionally assigned to the genus *Botryllus* as complete details of its life cycle are not available to confirm *Botrylloides* as a junior synonym. The species displays characteristics of Botryllinae, in which growth is associated with active replication of zooids. The species is distinguished by the opaque pale pigmentation of the colonies, the zooid arrangement in regular double rows converging to common cloacal openings at the top of low lobes, the large number of stigmata rows, and ovary lateral to the testes. We name the new species *Botryllus eilatensis*, after the collecting site, the coral reef of Eilat.

Key words: taxonomy, synonym, ascidian, Red Sea, Gulf of Aqaba, *Botrylloides*

Introduction

The coral reefs of the northern Gulf of Aqaba (Eilat) are noted for their extraordinarily high biodiversity (Loya 1972). Although situated at the northernmost boundaries of coral reef distribution, these reefs are among the most spectacular and diverse in the world and include many endemic species (Goren 1993). However, whereas corals, mollusks and fish, have been studied extensively, the ascidian fauna remains poorly known. The most recent list of ascidian species from Eilat (Pérès 1962) contains only 19 species. This list is certainly incomplete considering the number of ascidian species reported in the past from the Red Sea (Michaelsen 1918, 1920a,b). In the present paper we describe the morphology and distribution of a new species of the genus *Botryllus* from the coral reefs of Eilat. This genus has a wide distribution and is a common fouling organism in estuaries and shallow water (Kott, 1985). The two known genera in the subfamily Botryllinae, *Botryllus*