



Some shallow water octocorals (Coelenterata: Anthozoa) of the Persian Gulf

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Abstract

A collection of octocorals from the Persian Gulf is examined, and all species are identified to at least genus level. *Sinularia erecta* Tixier-Durivault, 1945; *S. compressa* Tixier-Durivault, 1945; *Subergorgia suberosa* (Pallas, 1766); *Junceella juncea* (Pallas, 1766); and *Acanthogorgia spinosa* Hiles, 1899, could be identified further. With some doubts *Trimuricea reticulata* (Thomson & Simpson, 1909), *Menella* cf. *kanisa* Grasshoff, 2000, and *Verrucella* cf. *reticulata* (Thomson & Simpson, 1909) are tentatively identified. *Subergorgia perezii* Stiasny, 1940 is synonymised with *Subergorgia suberosa* (Pallas, 1766), and *Echinogorgia bahrelfarsi* Stiasny, 1940 is assigned to *Menella*. Three new species are described and depicted.

Key words: Coelenterata, Cnidaria, Octocorallia, Alcyonacea, Alcyoniidae, benthos, Persian Gulf

Introduction

Thomson and Simpson (1909) were the first to publish about octocorals from the Persian Gulf. They described a collection present in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, collected by the Royal Indian Marine Survey Ship “Investigator” in the Indian Ocean (and Arabian Sea, and Adaman Sea and Indo-Pacific). These authors reported four known species as occurring in the Gulf, *Solenocaulon tortuosum* (Gray, 1862), *Echinogorgia ramulosa* Gray, 1870 (an *Echinogorgia* species, but probably different from Gray’s species), *Versluysia ramosa* (Thomson & Henderson, 1905), and *Parisis fruticosa* Verrill, 1864, and described one new species from the same region, *Nicella reticulata* (a species belonging to *Verrucella*). No precise localities were mentioned in the publication.

Later on, Stiasny (1940) described material in the alcyonarian collection of the Museum of Natural History in Paris. Part of this material is present in the RMNH and was re-examined by us. Stiasny reported two new records, *Echinogorgia macrospiculata* Thomson & Simpson, 1909, and *Junceella fragilis* Ridley, 1884, (= *Junceella juncea*, wrong identification of Stiasny) from stations close to the Strait of Hormuz. This author also described two new species from the Gulf, *Subergorgia perezii* (= *Subergorgia suberosa*, here synonymized) and *Echinogorgia bahrelfarsi* (according to us belonging to *Menella*).

In 1979 Burchard, surveying the coral fauna of Saudi Arabia and the western Persian Gulf, mentioned that there are several soft corals but he did not record any particular species.

In 1992 Sheppard *et al.* mentioned that in the Persian Gulf it has been commonly asserted that no soft corals occur, but west of Musandam some do occur, including *Dendronephthya*, however, they are rare and do not reach the central part of the Gulf.

In 1995 Rezai reported *Sarcophyton* sp. and *Dendronephthya* sp. from Larak and Lesser Tonb islands. He also reported some gorgonians around Bani Farur and Lesser Tonb Island, and Pennatulacea around Lavan and Hendorabi Island. His material does not exist anymore.

Finally, Rezai *et al.* (2004) reported *Subergorgia suberosa* (Pallas, 1766) from Lesser Tonb Island. It seems this report was based on the specimens that he collected in 1995, but he only mentioned them as gorgonians in that paper.

Here we describe material collected from the coast of Iran (Fig. 1) mainly by the first author. Some specimens collected in the Persian Gulf and present in the RMNH are also included. The identifications of Thomson & Simpson and also Stiasny are discussed.

Material and methods

The material is deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, formerly Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden, The Netherlands (RMNH).