



New data on soft corals (Cnidaria: Octocorallia: Alcyonacea) from Nha Trang Bay, South China Sea

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Abstract

A new species of *Eleutherobia* is described, enlarging the *Eleutherobia* species group that lack sclerites in the anthocodiae. The Octocorallia of the South-China Sea are poorly known, and the data that is presented provides a new record of the genus for Vietnam.

The original description of *Sinularia manaarensis* Verseveldt, 1980 was based on a single incomplete colony fragment collected in 1902 near Ceylon (Verseveldt, 1980, Pl. 16, Fig. 3). Here we present data on both living and preserved *S. manaarensis* colonies that were found in Nha Trang Bay (South China Sea) in 2006. The club-shaped surface sclerites with wide flattened handles are characteristic of the species. Images of live colonies are given along with a biogeographical discussion.

S. arctium **sp. nov.**, is also described. It has a remarkable assortment of sclerites, which includes both *leptocladus*-like clubs and warty clubs with a distinct central wart.

Key words: *Eleutherobia nezdoliiyi*, *E. grayi*, *Sinularia arctium*, *S. manaarensis*, new records, Nha Trang Bay, South China Sea, Cnidaria, Octocorallia

Introduction

Nineteen species of the genus *Eleutherobia* are known in the world, only 5 of them lack sclerites in the anthocodiae (Verseveldt & Bayer 1988; Williams 2003). The new species presented here enlarges this *Eleutherobia* group, and establishes a new record of the genus for Vietnam.

Sinularia manaarensis was described by Verseveldt (1980: 86–88, Fig. 43, Pl. 16, Fig. 3) for a colony fragment from the Gulf of Manaar, Ceylon. Verseveldt pointed out: “According to the enclosed label the specimen was collected by Herdmann in 1902; it was recorded as “type” by Pratt and identified with *S. gardineri* (see Pratt, 1905: 255)”. Verseveldt firstly recognized the specimen as distinct from *S. gardineri* (Pratt, 1903) and presented sclerites drawings (1980: Fig. 43). However, his drawings were not a comprehensive representation of all sclerite forms in *S. manaarensis* possibly because of the incompleteness of the holotype.

The present material of *S. manaarensis* was collected by the authors in 2006 near Mot Island in Nha Trang Bay, South China Sea, where numerous colonies covered the upper part of a large rock at a depth of 12 m. The aim of this study is to complete the species’ morphological description, including comments on variability within and between colonies, and to clarify the important skeletal features of *S. manaarensis*. Images of living colonies and complete sclerite descriptions are given.

S. arctium, new species, is another species of the genus (along with *S. slieringsi* Ofwegen & Vennam, 1994) with a remarkable assortment of sclerites which includes both *leptocladus*-like clubs and clubs with a central wart.