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A sea of worms: polychaete checklist of the Adriatic Sea

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Abstract

The checklist of polychaetes of the Adriatic Sea (Mediterranean) based on bibliographic sources published from 1840 to 2014, as well as on novel data, with 49 new records for the area, is herein presented. The Adriatic Sea polychaete fauna comprises at present of 764 species in 360 genera and 62 families. The richest family is the Syllidae, with 112 species (c.a. 15% of the all taxa). Eight families account for as much as 50% of the diversity (Syllidae, Serpulidae, Sabellidae, Phyllodocidae, Spionidae, Polynoidae, Terebellidae and Nereididae). Among the three Adriatic sectors (Northern, Central and Southern Adriatic), the Northern Adriatic is the richest one, whereas the composition of the most diverse families is very similar in all sectors. Data on endemisms (6), aliens (29) and valid species with the type locality in the Adriatic Sea (90) are also discussed. The list of all relevant papers citing each species in the Adriatic is included, allowing future detailed information retrievals for distinct purposes. Results suggest that the number of species will keep increasing in the future, as new surveys will be undertaken, so regular updates of the present list will be necessary.

Key words: Annelida, Polychaeta, check-list, inventory, Adriatic Sea, Mediterranean, biodiversity

Introduction

Polychaetes are mostly marine invertebrates widely distributed in all marine habitats, from the intertidal zone to the deepest sediments. Estimated number of accepted species of polychaetes in the world is around 9000 (Rouse & Pleijel 2001), however it is supposed that the polychaete diversity is much higher and that there are many more species to be described. Polychaetes often represent the dominant macrobenthic group in both soft and hard bottom assemblages in regard to the number of species and abundance (Knox 1977, Musco 2012). Furthermore, they have wide ranges of feeding habits (Fauchald & Jumars 1979) and representatives on almost all levels of trophic web so they can be used to describe trophic structures of benthic communities (Gambi *et al.* 1982; Bianchi & Morri 1985). Being adapted to different environmental conditions (among them there are both tolerant and sensitive species) they are often used as indicators of pollution. Due to their dominance, wide functional diversity, broad distribution and ability to adapt to different environmental conditions, polychaetes can be considered well-suited group for describing state and dynamics of benthic communities (Olsgard & Somerfield 2000; Olsgard *et al.* 2003; Giangrande *et al*. 2005). Considering the ecological significance of the group, the updated knowledge on polychaete diversity of a certain area is important.

The first complete polychaete checklist of the Adriatic Sea was compiled by Požar-Domac in 1994, which included 559 species from 53 families. Cantone (2003) reported 580 benthic polychaete species in the Adriatic, belonging to 57 families. The last inventory of the Adriatic polychaetes is part of the polychaete checklist of Italian seas (Castelli *et al.* 2008), which reports 636 species. Although that latter checklist covers mainly the records in the Italian territory, relevant findings along the coasts of neighbouring countries were also considered (Relini *et al.* 2008).

The aim of the present checklist is to compile all existing data, including personal unpublished records, and to provide an updated list of the polychaetes of the whole Adriatic Sea. Moreover, this checklist will be the first to include all the relevant papers reporting each species present in the Adriatic Sea, allowing easier access to additional information on respective species.

Balci and collaborators. Moreover, Hempelman (1906) described *Polygordius triestinus* from the Bay of Trieste, while Munari *et al.* (2009) reported *Saccocirrus papillocercus* from the Po lagoon. Further research concerning this important constituent of the benthos needs to be done.

In overall it is evident that the accumulation curve for the number of species described in the Adriatic Sea has not reached an asymptote, suggesting that new species will be found. Trends of description of new species in the Adriatic Sea correspond to the observed by Coll *et al*. (2010) for the Mediterranean Sea. In the present checklist 49 species are reported for the first time in the Adriatic Sea, most of them found on the stations concentrated in the NA. Such a high number of new records on a restricted area suggest that the number of species will further grow as new surveys will be undertaken and the present list should be regularly updated in the future.

At present the major threats to the diversity of the Mediterranean fauna, including polychaetes, are habitat loss and degradation, followed by fishing impacts, pollution, climate change, eutrophication, and the establishment of alien species (Coll *et al.* 2010). All these impacts are expected to grow in the future, particularly climate change and habitat degradation. Biodiversity research, monitoring of invasive species spread and measures for biodiversity protection depend on the better knowledge of the species that comprise the fauna of an area. Thus it is believed that the information gathered herein on the diversity and distribution of the polychaetes in the Adriatic Sea will be a useful tool for future researches and monitoring of trends and eventual changes in their diversity.

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