



## Notes on a small collection of thecate hydroids (Cnidaria: Hydrozoa) from Tristan da Cunha, south Atlantic

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### Abstract

A pilot survey of the shallow-water, thecate hydroid fauna of Tristan da Cunha archipelago, was undertaken for the first time. The examination of the collected material revealed the presence of at least sixteen hydroids, of which three could not be identified to species level in the absence of fertile specimens. Two sympatric morphotypes, provisionally assigned to *Halecium delicatulum* Coughtrey, 1876, are described, along with a discussion on the astonishingly wide morphological variation attributed to this taxon. All the present species are illustrated, and some of them are either described or accompanied by brief remarks. Only twelve hydroids were previously reported from the study area and the present report adds eleven new records to the list of known species, bringing their number to twenty-three.

**Key words:** Hydroids, Leptothecata, Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible Island, Nightingale Island

### Introduction

The Tristan da Cunha archipelago (part of the United Kingdom Overseas Territory of St. Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha) lies in the South Atlantic, about 2800 km from South Africa, and some 3200 km from the nearest point of South America. It consists of six small islands which are part of a chain of South Atlantic volcanic seamounts, on the East slope of the mid-Atlantic ridge. Five islands are grouped together, namely Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible, Nightingale, Middle (Alex), and Stoltenhoff. The sixth, Gough Island, lies more distantly, about 350 km South-Southeast of Tristan da Cunha.

Due to its geographical isolation and extremely exposed nature, the benthos of the archipelago has been little sampled and, consequently, its marine fauna is relatively poorly known. Among several scientific expeditions that visited the archipelago, the Norwegian expedition of 1936–1937 stayed for several months, made thorough collections and published accounts of shallow-water marine animal groups and algae, but there appears to be no published record of the hydroids. Only three scientific cruises, namely *Challenger* (1873–1876), the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (1902–1904), and the German *Gauss* Expedition (1901–1903), published the results of hydroid collections.

The *Challenger* material, collected from Gough Island, was studied by Allman (1883, 1888), who reported on four species, all new to science: *Plumularia stylifera*, *Antennularia* (= *Corhyza*) *fascicularis*, *Halecium fastigiatum*, and *Sertularia* (= *Sertularella*) *leiocarpa*. The hydroids obtained from Gough Island by *Scotia* were studied by Ritchie (1907, 1909), who added seven species previously unrecorded, of which two, *Antennella quadriaurita* and *Brucella* (= *Zygophylax*) *armata*, were new. Finally, the hydroids gathered by *Gauss* were entrusted to Vanhöffen (1910), who reported on only one species from Nightingale Island, which had been previously recorded by *Scotia*. The number of known species provided by these three expeditions totals twelve. However, these cruises collected mainly by dredging from deep water up to 200 m.

The present report deals with hydroid material collected between 2005 and 2007 from the shallow subtidal of Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible, and Nightingale islands, and provides additional data on the thecate hydroid fauna from the study area, bringing the number of known species to twenty-three.