

The Occurrence and Morphology of *Sargassopsis* gen. nov. (Phaeophyta, Fucales) in Southern Oman

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Abstract

During surveys of the southern Oman (Dhofar) coast, a large *Sargassum*-like fuclean alga was abundant in parts of the shallow sublittoral (0–9 m below Chart Datum). This plant showed pronounced seasonal changes in form and biomass, connected with meteorological and hydrographical changes centered around the summer monsoons. The distribution, habitat and phenology of this plant are outlined. The plant was identifiable with *Sargassum zanardinii* Schiffner (Phaeophyta, Fucales); however, the present authors consider that it has certain clear-cut characters which warrant its separation from *Sargassum* and *Sargassum zanardinii* is here transferred to a new genus, *Sargassopsis* Nizamuddin, Hiscock, Barratt *et* Ormond *gen. nov.*

Introduction

Surveys of the marine habitats and communities of southern Oman have been carried out by the Tropical Marine Research Unit (TMRU), University of York, U.K. and the Council for the Conservation of the Environment and Water Resources, Muscat, Oman. The TMRU surveys collected and recorded many interested marine algae (and animals) from Dhofar, including those from warm temperate and even colder water during and after the summer monsoons. Communities present in the littoral and sublittoral have been described briefly in the survey report (Barratt *et al.* 1986). This paper is concerned with a fuclean alga which was abundant in the shallow sublittoral at many of the sites and dominant from 0–6 metres below Chart Datum in the immediate post-monsoon period. This plant, previously described in the literature as a species of *Sargassum* (Schiffner 1934), is here placed in a new genus, *Sargassopsis*.

Previous marine biological work on the south Arabian coast has been very limited. The first indications in

the literature that this coast may be an interesting one for marine algae comes from Schiffner (1934), reporting on collections by W. Hein from Gishin (Qishn) on the south Yemen coast approximately 300 km southwest of Dhofar. Schiffner described a distinctive fuclean alga, *Acystis heinii* Schiffner, which is apparently restricted to the south east coast of Arabia (Schiffner 1934, Newton 1953). *Acystis* has not been reported for the Red Sea (Newton 1953, Papenfuss 1968). Schiffner (1934) also commented on a distinctive *Sargassum*-like plant described by Zanardini (1858) as *Sargassum yemense* De Notaris f. *monstruosum*, but renamed *Sargassum zanardinii* by Schiffner as he thought it sufficiently distinct to warrant species status. The only published lists for the Dhofar region are from the John Murray Expedition in 1933–34 (Newton 1953) when a few collections were made, mainly from the Kuria Muria Islands. These lists contain *Acystis heinii*, but at the time of publication the *Sargassum* species were not identified. However, the specimens from the John Murray Expedition held in the British Museum (Natural History) (BM) include four plants later referred to as *Sargassum zanardinii*. More recently the species has also been collected from Mukalla and Gasier in the Yemen (Banaimoon 1991).

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