

SHORT COMMUNICATION

The polychaete *Lygdamis wirtzi* at Ascension and St Helena Islands (Annelida, Polychaeta, Sabellariidae)

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Little is known about the polychaete fauna of the two mid-Atlantic Islands, Ascension and St Helena. Baird (1864), Monro (1930), and Hartmann-Schröder (1992) documented the polychaetes from Ascension Island while Day (1946) reported polychaetes from St Helena Island. Lastly, Yáñez-Rivera & Brown (2015) reported on Hermodice and Eurythoe from both Ascension and St Helena Islands. We do not know any other publications on polychaetes for these two remote islands.

The genus *Lygdamis* (Family Sabellariidae) currently contains 20 species (Hutchings et al. 2012; Capa et al. 2015). *Lygdamis wirtzi* Nishi and Núñez, 1999, was originally described from Madeira Island and the Canary Islands and has also been found at the Cape Verde Islands and at São Tomé Island (Wirtz 2001, 2003).

New observations of this species were made while SCUBA diving at the coasts of Ascension and St Helena Islands in 2013 and 2015.

The specimens were collected from coarse sandy habitats in depths of ~10-12m. The animals (two specimens from St Helena and one from Ascension), were photographed *in-situ* and then collected by hand and stored in 70-80% ETOH. Preserved specimens were sent to the second author for identification. They are now deposited in the Coastal Branch, Natural History Museum and Institute, Chiba, Japan.

Morphological study by the second author confirmed the initial, provisional identification of the specimens as *Lygdamis wirtzi*. An animal from St. Helena Island is shown in a colour photo in a popular book by Brown (2014, p. 40). Figure 1 shows an animal from Ascension Island. In both places, the species was common in bottoms of coarse sand or gravel in shallow water.

Despite actively searching for it, the third author has not found *Lygdamis wirtzi* when diving on the coasts of Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Gabon. Until now, the species is only known from (sub) tropical



Fig. 1. *Lygdamis wirtzi* at Ascension Island (Photo J. Brown)

islands in the eastern and central Atlantic Ocean. *Lygdamis* species are notoriously difficult to observe and to collect as they quickly retract into their tubes when approached. These new records increase the known distribution of *Lygdamis wirtzi* and it is likely that this and other *Lygdamis* species are much more wide-spread than currently known.

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