

The Red Sea Biodiversity Project: Collection, understanding and preservation of the marine fauna of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The Red Sea Biodiversity Project, a research collaboration of King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (KAU) and Senckenberg Research Institute, Frankfurt, Germany (SRI), was founded in 2011. The main goal of this project is to assess and report on the marine biodiversity of the Saudi Arabian Red Sea. We collect, identify and preserve a broad variety of marine species from various animal groups of that area and describe new taxa with integrative taxonomic methods. We currently build up a large reference collection and develop a Museum in order to close knowledge gaps and to communicate our results not only to scientists but also to the public. In various expeditions, the marine fauna along the Saudi Arabian coastline was sampled at 356 locations. Animals are identified to species level and catalogued into two publicly accessible reference collection databases both for SRI and KAU. In sum, they currently contain around 5.300 series with 13.600 individuals of more than 1.000 different species. The project was documented in 45 peer-reviewed publications and other scientific outputs. Herein, 22 species and two genera were described as new to science, while another 29 species were recorded as new to the Red Sea.