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Deeper, Larger, More Common: Cryptic Coral Species *Podabacia* Benefits from Reef Recovery

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors AK and KS designed the study, performed fieldwork and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors OJ and Samsuardi supported the fieldwork. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

In 2000 a protected area of 20,000 ha was established in West Sumatra, Indonesia (MPA Pulau Pieh) and the partial reef recovery is well documented. During monitoring of destructed reefs, a new cryptic mushroom coral species, *Podabacia kunzmanni*, was detected. It is not common, with rather occasional occurrence and most specimens are small. During recent visits in 2018 and 2019, the authors detected numerous specimens, mainly at three locations within the MPA Pulau Pieh, mainly at Pulau Pandan. Most individuals were found in greater depth, down to 18 m, reaching diameters of up to 20 cm. With regard to size, depth distribution and abundance, three new records can be established for this species. There are two potential explanations for finding them mainly on dead reefs: either they are better survivors or they are better colonizers of dead coral substrata. The team is presently collecting more data on the distribution and the reasons behind the sudden rise in visibility.

Keywords: Coral reef; MPA; mushroom coral; Indonesia; cryptic species.

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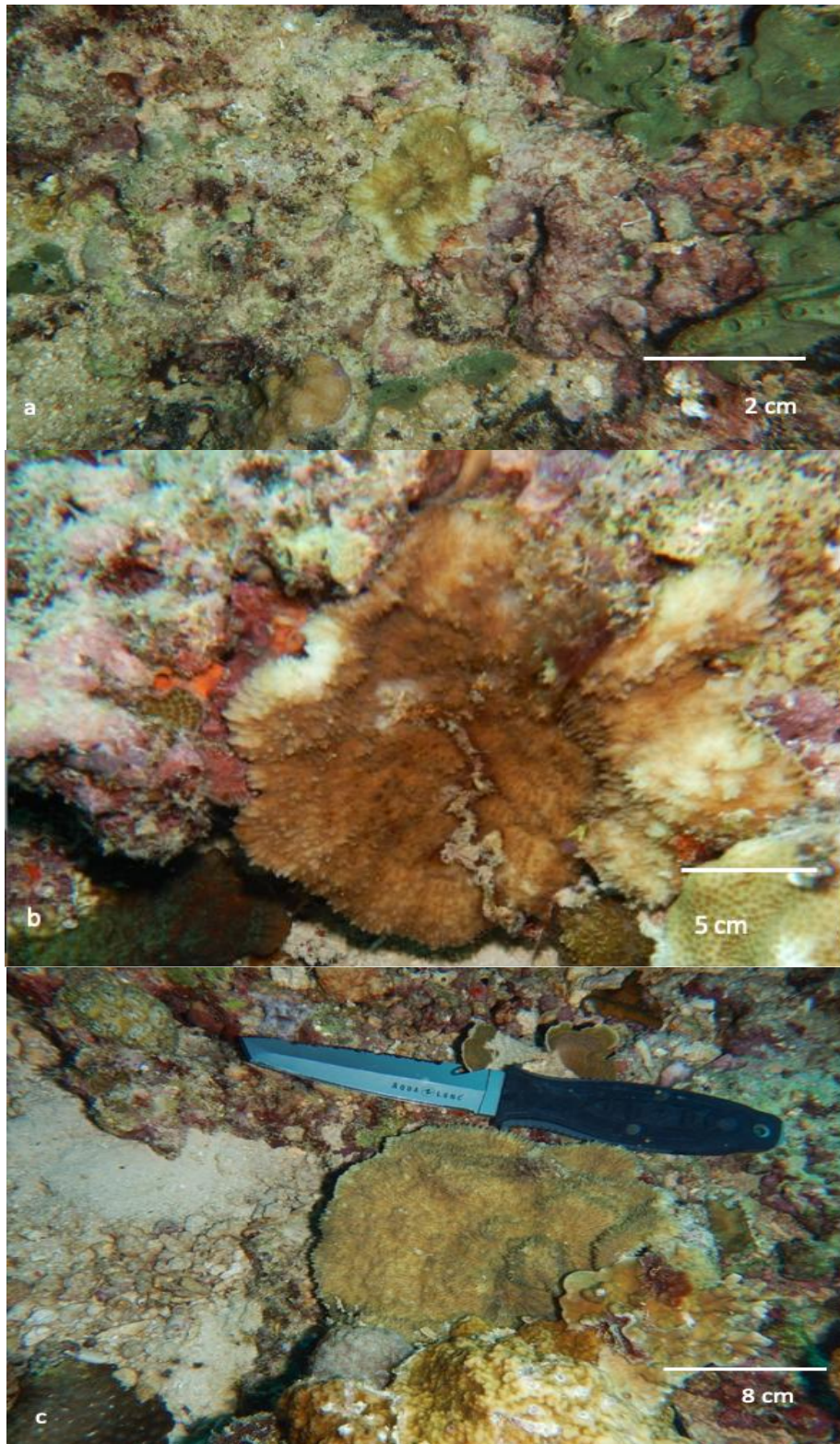


Fig. 2. *Podabacia kunzmanni* at different depths: a) small (in 4 m), b) large (in 10 m) and c) very large (in 18 m), all attached to coral rock

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Hoeksema [9] gives two potential explanations for finding them mainly on dead reefs: either they are better survivors or they are better colonizers of dead coral substrata. The fact that regular monitoring in West Sumatra was conducted for the last ten years [10-13] with only very occasional records of this species, suggests that it is not only a better colonizer of dead corals, but also benefitted from recovering reefs, as it was also regularly found in between healthy corals at Pulau Pieh and Pulau Pandan, expanding into greater depth and producing larger specimens. So far there were no additional site records of the species since its original discovery and publication in 2009. Coastal managers of Indonesia and Singapore should therefore apply a precautionary approach and try to get it listed as a CITES species in IUCN's list of endangered species. The team is presently collecting more data on the distribution and the reasons behind the sudden rise in visibility. All stations mentioned in Hoeksema [9] will be investigated.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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