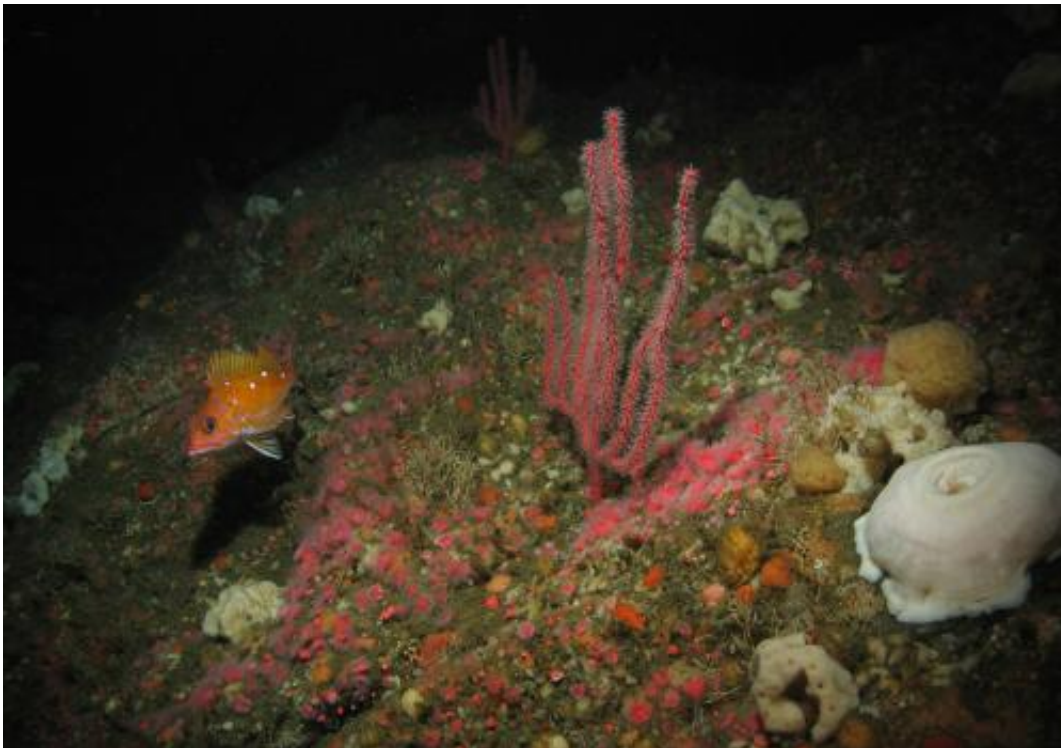


The jewels of the ocean: Two new species and a new genus of octocorals from the Pacific

June 3 2013



Undersea photograph by Remote Operational Vehicle of the new genus *Chromoplexaura*, 83 m in depth, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, 30 miles west of the San Francisco Bay Area. This is an undersea photograph by Remote Operational Vehicle of the new genus *Chromoplexaura*, 83 m in depth, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, 30 miles west of the San Francisco Bay Area, California., California Credit: NOAA

The flora and fauna of the American west coast is generally believed to

be well explored and studied. However, a new study and a taxonomic assessment of the octocorals from the north eastern Pacific Ocean proves such assumptions wrong, with two new beautiful and colourful species of soft corals alongside a new genus. The study was published in the open access journal *Zookeys*.

"It is remarkable that in a region previously thought to be as familiar and well known as the west coast of North America – with its numerous large urban centers and major marine laboratories – revisionary systematics are not only still possible, but essential for our understanding of global biodiversity," comments the author of the study Dr Williams, California Academy of Sciences.



This image shows the polyps of the newly discovered pale-orange *Cryptophyton jedsmithi*. Credit: Jeff Goddard

The paper describes four aspects of the North American [west coast](#) fauna, such as a new [species](#) of pale orange stoloniferous soft coral from San Diego, California. Also included is a revisionary assessment of a well-known soft coral previously misidentified as *Gersemia rubiformis* from the Pacific Northwest. Another new species of the soft coral *Gersemia* from the coast of British Columbia, Canada has been also described. This new species is found in colonies with beautiful pink to reddish coloration in life.



This image shows the pink polyps of the new species *Gersemia lambi*. Credit: Marc Chamberlain

The study also defines a new [genus](#) named for a species previously placed in a tropical Indo-Pacific genus for the past century. The species for which the genus was erected inhabits the Gulf of the Farallones

National Marine Sanctuary near San Francisco, California, as well as several other localities on the Pacific Coast. The remarkable diversity of octocorals accounts for around 3400 species described worldwide. Although the majority of octocoral taxa was described in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much of this colourful marine fauna is in fact only minimally studied and continues to surprise with [new discoveries](#) nowadays.

More information: Williams GC (2013) New taxa and revisionary systematics of alcyonacean octocorals from the Pacific coast of North America (Cnidaria, Anthozoa). *ZooKeys* 283: 15. [doi: 10.3897/zookeys.283.4803](#)

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