

Scientific note

First record of *Epidendrium aureum* (Gastropoda, Epitoniidae) associated with *Tubastrea* corals (Scleractinia, Dendrophylliidae) from Lakshadweep, India

(Gastropoda; Scleractinia)

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Epidendrium aureum Gittenberger & Gittenberger, 2005 are highly cryptic and fragile marine gastropod molluscs ornamented with more or less prominent axial riblets, resembling closely to that of *E. billeanum*, but differ in having a dark purplish red protoconch instead of a white to yellowish one. These animals live as parasites on coelenterates; namely corals, zoanths or sea anemones (Gittenberger & Gittenberger 2005). Studies by Gittenberger & Gittenberger (2005) found that *E. billeanum* occurs only in the East Pacific and that the shells of *E. aureum* often occur sympatrically, in large numbers, on the same host colony (*Tubastrea* or *Dendrophyllia* species).

E. aureum (Fig. 1) was found during the field studies in Agatti (10°50'9.24"N 72°11'5.41"E) in April 2015, at 0.5 m depth, associated with *Tubastrea* corals during low tide, when the intertidal area was completely exposed. The *Tubastrea* corals were fixed to the underside of large coral boulders and in coral crevices. Two specimens (BNHS Gastro 819 and BNHS Gastro 820) were collected. The larger specimen BNHS Gastro 820, 3.2 mm in length, served as the specimen for this study. While the specimens had typical characteristics of the species, the protoconch had 3½ whorls and the teleoconch had 4¾ whorls, separated by a moderately deep suture. Operculum was paucispiral.

While 19 species from 4 genera of Epitoniidae are reported so far from India (Tripathy & Mukhopadhyay 2015), *Epitonium bellicosum* and *Epitonium japonicum* are the only epitoniid shells previously recorded from Lakshadweep by Apte (2014) and Susan et al. (2012) respectively. Thus, this is the first record of *E. aureum* from Indian waters and the northern most range limit of the species so far in the Indian Ocean.

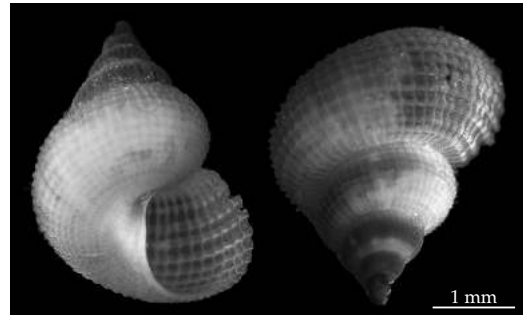


Fig. 1. Shell of *Epidendrium aureum*.

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