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# 1.15 Deep-sea mushroom soft corals (Octocorallia: Alcyonacea: Alcyoniidae) from the Flemish Pass, Flemish Cap and Grand Bank of Newfoundland (northwest Atlantic)

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Deep-sea mushroom softcorals are known from the Grand Bank of Newfoundland and nearby areas (northwest Atlantic) since the end of the 19th century, with *Anthomastus grandiflorus* Verrill, 1878, type species of the genus *Anthomastus*, first described from off Sable Island. Other species have been described from the North Atlantic where they may be locally abundant. These animals have been the subject of a great confusion due to misidentifications, poor descriptions (even of the type material), and inadequate synonymizations. Their study has been neglected for a long time, and no revision has been published of the northwest Atlantic fauna since Deichmann (1936).

During the course of Spanish/EU bottom trawl groundfishsurveys in the Flemish Cap, Flemish Pass and the Grand Bank of Newfoundland,five bathyal species were collected in a considerable depth interval and varied types of bottoms, namely: *A. grandiflorus*, *Anthomastus canariensis* Wright & Studer, 1889, *Pseudoanthomastus agaricus* (Studer, 1891), *Pseudoanthomastus* sp. and *Heteropolypus sol* Molodtsova, 2013. In this paper, all these species are described and depicted with illustrations of the colonies and the sclerome, and distribution maps and ecological data are provided. Despite the synonymizations suggested by some authors, there are noticeable differences between species in colony structure and/or sclerome. These differences are herein highlighted and a key is proposed for the identification of the species from the study area. Delimitation of genera proposed by Molodtsova (2013) is considered solid. Both species of *Pseudoanthomastus* have commensal polychaetes below the capitulum.

The most abundant species was *H. sol.* It was found in soft bottoms, mainly sandy silt and silty sand. The other species were also associated to soft bottoms, although they occur attached to hard substrata as small pebbles or boulders, or to other fauna as large sponges. *H. sol* was found at the shallowest depth (348 m), with a bathymetric range of 942 m, while the deepest recorded species was *P. agaricus* (1351 m). All the species were found at temperatures and salinities between 3.25 and 4.2 ºC and 34.78 and 34.93 ‰, respectively.

The richness of mushroom soft corals in the study area is worth mention, and although a work is still to be done, we have shown that at least five species occur. This area, despite being of a great faunistical and biogeographical interest, has not focused the interest of the octocorals taxonomists since a long time ago, and new discoveries are expected.

**Keywords**: *Anthomastus*, *Heteropolypus, Pseudoanthomastus*, bathyal, NW Atlantic

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