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Review: Taxonomic Guide to the Polychaetous Annelids of the Northern Gulf of Mexico edited by J.M. Uebelacker and P.G. Johnson

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BOOK REVIEW:

J.M. Uebelacker and P.G. Johnson
(Editors), 1984.

Taxonomic Guide to the Polychaetous
Annelids of the Northern Gulf of Mexico.

Final Report to the
Minerals Management Service,
Contract 14-12-00-29091.

Barry A. Vittor & Associates, Inc.,
Mobile, Alabama.

7 vols. \$125.00.

Available from

Barry A. Vittor & Associates, Inc.,
8100 Cottage Hill Road,
Mobile, Alabama 36609.

This guide to the polychaetes of the northern Gulf of Mexico summarizes the taxonomic knowledge of this group of marine invertebrates for the area. The study was based on the collections made by many different laboratories under the auspices of the Bureau of Land Management Outer Continental Shelf program. Study programs sponsored by the BLM-OCS include South Texas Outer Continental Shelf (STOCS), Ixtoc Oil Spill Assessment, Central Gulf of Mexico Ecological Study of Petroleum Production Platforms (CTGLF), Mississippi-Alabama-Florida Outer Continental Shelf (MALFA), and Southwestern Florida Shelf (SOFLA). Unfortunately collections made during this period from the same area but sponsored by private companies were not included in this guide (i.e., the Buccaneer and Offshore Ecology Investigation) which would have provided additional coverage.

It is no longer possible for one individual to accomplish a task such as this. A total of 14 authors wrote 60 chapters which in turn were reviewed by 14 people who are experts in polychaete systematics. Consistency in style and presentation throughout the seven

volumes was maintained under the careful guidance of the editors Uebelacker and Johnson.

Some numbers are in order to give an indication of the magnitude of the project. The seven volumes comprise 1438 pages covering 58 families (plus two unknown ones), 289 genera and 593 species. Of the 593 species, 243 were considered potentially new species. These were designated as species A, B, C, etc., since the authors did not consider this guide as the proper place to describe new species. A viewpoint in which I agree. They did, however, describe and figure each of these unknown species and distinguish it from closely related species. The authors plan to describe them as new species through established taxonomic journals. I strongly encourage them to do so in the near future.

Each chapter representing a family, is organized according to an introduction which is a brief review and cites and principal papers, a family diagnosis outlining the morphological characteristics used in identification, biological notes, a list of species recorded from the BLM-OCS programs, a key to the genera, a generic diagnosis, a key to the species within the genus, and a species account including figures. Under each species, the authority is referenced along with synonymies and important citations. The station locations, number of species examined, the description, and the known distribution is given. The consistent organization of this guide will greatly facilitate its use.

Some workers may undoubtedly object to the typewritten format, photocopy prints, and plastic spiral binding. I do not because this work probably would never have been published if the text was typeset and bound in a hard cover. Others may object to the price of \$125.00.

I do not because of the extensive coverage of the guide. This guide will be the beginning of any future work in the Gulf of Mexico; it is that good. My main reservation is that the authors followed the family arrangement according to Fauchald (1977) which begins with the Family Orbiniidae; I favor the more traditional arrangement beginning with the scale worms. Moreover, it would have been helpful if the families included within a volume were listed on the cover.

The entire BLM-OCS program has cost the taxpayers of United States over 400 million dollars. The biological component was an important element of this program yet this is the only monographic taxonomic study which has appeared. It is imperative that other such studies appear and hopefully the Minerals Management Service will support this very useful task. This guide published by Barry A. Vittor and Associates, Inc. and well edited by Uebelacker and Johnson should serve as a standard for future guides. This is a job well done.

LITERATURE CITED

Fauchald, K., 1977. The polychaete worms. Definitions and keys to orders, families and genera. Los Angeles County Mus. Natur. Hist., Science Ser. 28:1-190.

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