

A New Species of the Pacific Coral Genus *Blastomussa* from New Caledonia¹

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IN 1961, J. W. Wells (1961: 189) described the new species *Bantamia merleti*. Later on (1968: 276), he changed the generic name and defined the new genus *Blastomussa*, with *B. merleti* as the type and only species. In the latter article an additional specimen was figured. In my opinion in this case another species is involved than the one described in 1961, though both belong to the same genus.

During my stay in New Caledonia in 1968, I frequently met with *Blastomussa merleti*, which is not rare in the bays around Nouméa, where it occurs with species like *Alveopora catalai* and *Cynarina cynarea* in rather turbid water, where the light is scarcer than in the lagoon. The bottom consists of sand and mud (Wijsman-Best, 1972: 63). Several specimens were collected. *B. merleti* is rather variable in color; pale violet polyps have not been mentioned before, but their skeleton is hardly different from that of the brown ones.

Blastomussa merleti (Wells, 1961)

Material

Baie Dumbéa near Nouméa, New Caledonia: Coel 6058 (depth 10–20 m; polyps brown with green fluorescent peristome) and Coel 6056 (depth 16 m; polyps brown with pale green fluorescent peristome).

Banc Gail, lagoon near Nouméa, New Caledonia: Coel 6059 (depth 30–35 m; polyps brown with green fluorescent peristome), Coel 6060 (depth 30 m, polyps pale violet, septa on the average more dentated), and Coel 6061 (depth 30 m, polyps brown with green fluorescent peristome).

All specimens mentioned are preserved and

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² Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden.

registered in the Zoological Museum, Amsterdam.

However, in a subaquatic cave in the exposed slope of the barrier reef, at a depth of 30–35 m, large colonies were found resembling *B. merleti*, but differing by the much larger size of the corallites, the consequently higher number of septa (the latter being more exsert and more dentated), and the less-developed epitheca. When I considered describing this material as a new species and asked his opinion, Wells mentioned (personal communication, 1972) that he was, by then, aware that the specimen figured as *B. merleti* in 1968 belongs to a hitherto undescribed species. On the basis of photographs of the holotype of this new species (Fig. 1 and 2), Wells confirmed that it does not belong to *B. merleti* and that it is conspecific with his 1968 specimen. It seems appropriate then to name the new species in honor of Professor Wells who has done so much to promote our knowledge of coral taxonomy.

Blastomussa wellsii sp. n.

Fig. 1, 2

Colony phaceloid; budding extratentacular. Calices more or less round, average diameter 11 mm (ranging from 9 to 13 mm); septa ranging in number from 24 to 32 (average 28); septa well developed. Primary septa continuing up to the columella, with four to six teeth. Outer teeth near the theca strong (Mussidae type), giving the corallite a spiny appearance. The teeth continue on the costal ridge up to the edge zone. No paliform lobes present; columella trabecular.

Theca septothecal, about 2–3 cm high, occasionally up to 5 cm.

Polyps light brown.

Holotype: Coel 6905, in the Zoological Museum, Amsterdam.

Paratypes: Coel 6906, 6907, 6908, in the

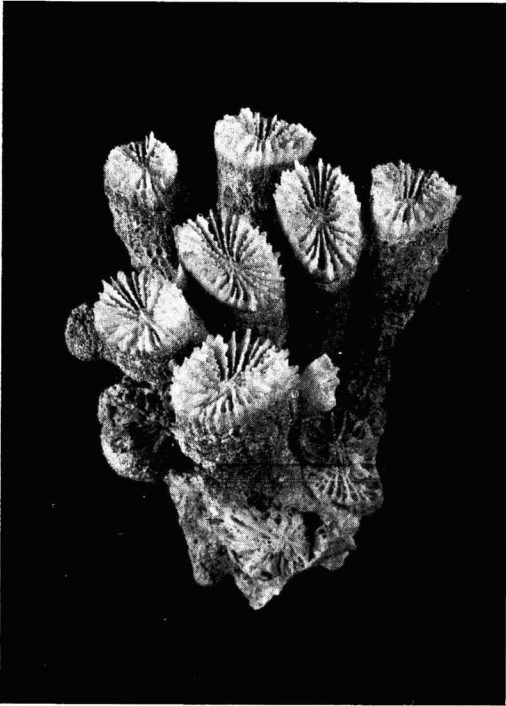


FIG. 1. *Blastomussa wellsi* sp. n. Holotype, corallum, $\times 2.5$. Photograph by Ch. Hoorn.

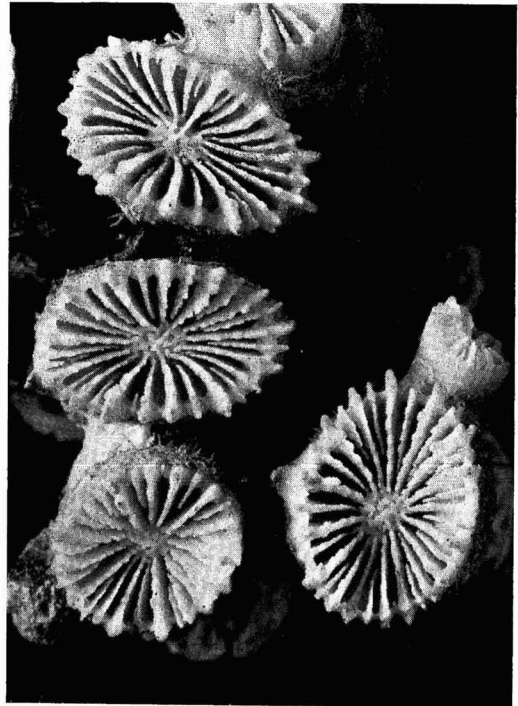


FIG. 2. *Blastomussa wellsi* sp. n. Close-up of some of the calices of the holotype, $\times 5$. Photograph by Ch. Hoorn.

Zoological Museum, Amsterdam. Locality: Grotte de Merlet, 30–35 m depth, near Passe Kouaré in the barrier reef south of Nouméa, New Caledonia.

LITERATURE CITED

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- WIJSMAN-BEST, M. 1972. Systematics and ecology of New Caledonian Faviinae (Coelenterata-Scleractinia). *Bijdr. Dierk.* (Amsterdam) 42: 1–90, fig. 18, pl. XIV.