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Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE 1998		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1998 to 00-00-1998	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Taxonomy of the Harpacticoid Copepods of the Northern Gulf of Mexico: A Taxon of Potential Importance to the Navy				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Florida State University, Department of Oceanography, Tallahassee, FL, 32306-4320				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES See also ADM002252.					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 2	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

The Taxonomy of the Harpacticoid Copepods of the Northern Gulf of Mexico: A Taxon of Potential Importance to the Navy

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LONG-TERM GOALS

There is a crisis in taxonomy. The professionals who could identify species and describe new taxa are literally dying, and their jobs are being eliminated or shifted to other disciplines. If the infrastructure of ecology, in particular, and biology generally is to be maintained, a way has to be found to train new workers in taxonomy while simultaneously making them employable. It is my long-term goal to contribute to the solution of this problem.

OBJECTIVES

I believe that this goal can be achieved by training graduate students in oceanography to do the taxonomy of the groups they study, thus passing taxonomic skills to a new generation. A doctoral student Lori Bouck is being trained in this way in my laboratory.

APPROACH

The Navy has had a long-term presence in harbors and the estuaries in which they are situated. The environmental consequences of this presence is of concern. To determine if impact has occurred (or if recovery of an impacted area is complete) will require comparison of faunas from impacted and control sites, which will depend on an infrastructure of scientific names. Because not all organisms can be studied, target groups must be used for such comparisons. Because of their ubiquity and abundance, harpacticoid copepods (Crustacea) are particularly appropriate for this purpose. Therefore, the taxonomic education of the student mentioned above is focused on the harpacticoid copepod fauna of estuaries.

The student and I are studying harpacticoids from subtidal, estuarine sediments from the northern Gulf of Mexico. For abundant species that appear to be new to science, we assemble the relevant taxonomic literature to confirm that the species have not been previously been described. We then dissect, mount, and illustrate specimens to provide the information needed to formally describe the species. We supplement this light-microscope work with parallel investigations using the scanning electron microscope.

Because this grant is a training grant, the student and I have also been studying treatises on modern taxonomic methods and have been consulting with other harpacticoid taxonomists about techniques.

WORK COMPLETED

Work in FY98 has concentrated on the taxonomy of the genus *Zausodes* in north Florida waters. We have written a manuscript describing three new species and two existing species and submitted it to the Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History).

Taxonomic illustrations traditionally have been inked by hand. This technique is slow and mistakes are difficult to correct. Rather than teach the student this approach, I suggested that she investigate computer-aided drawing. This effort has been a great success. It shortens the time needed to prepare a figure, allows mistakes to be easily fixed, and greatly facilitates the preparation of plates. The student and I have prepared a manuscript describing our techniques.

RESULTS

The student continues to make good progress in acquiring taxonomic skills and has begun publishing in this field. With the completion of the *Zausodes* study, she has begun work on the taxonomically important genus *Pholenota*.

IMPACT

See OBJECTIVES.

TRANSITIONS

Our discovery that computer-aided drawing can be used for taxonomic illustrations may change the way such illustrations are made. The student and I have presented two posters on our procedures at scientific meetings. Several professional taxonomists have expressed interest in learning our methods. We are preparing a protocol, which we will place on our Web site.

RELATED PROJECTS

None.

PUBLICATIONS

Bouck, L., D. Thistle, and R. Huys. Submitted. Systematics and Phylogeny of *Zausodes* C. B. Wilson (Copepoda, Harpacticoida, Harpacticidae) including three new species from the northern Gulf of Mexico. Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History).