COMMENSAL AMPHIPODS IN ASCIDIANS AND SPONGES OFF PHUKET ISLAND

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ABSTRACT: Host associations of four endofaunal amphipods were investigated during three months of fieldwork at Phuket Marine Biological Center (PMBC) in Thailand. Two amphipod species, Colomastix lunarlo and Leucothoe tridens, were reported in the area around Phuket for the first time. Colomastix lunarlo was found in two sponge species, Haliclona sp. and Amphimedon sp. The former host was found on a reef flat and provided C. lunarlo with protection even during low tide periods (unnatural for endobiont amphipods found in littoral sponges). Leucothoe tridens was found in the sponge Haliclona cf. pigmentifera. Nepanamixis sp. was found in the numerous oscula scattered over the sponge Xestospongia sp. and was host specific, the sponge providing the amphipod with camouflage. Leucothoe furina was not found to be host specific but had a preference for Polycarpa sp., a large solitary ascidian, with an occupancy rate of 80%. A few adults and cohorts of juveniles occupied the host. Sub-adults were found as epifauna among coral-rubble. Polycarpa sp. forms an important reproduction habitat for L. furina juveniles which experience extended parental care in their host. The absence of sub-adults in Polycarpa sp. is explained by intraspecific competition.