MACROALGAE DISTRIBUTION IN CUBAN MESOPHOTIC CORAL REEFS: FIRST RESULTS.

Beatriz Martínez-Daranas[1*], M. Dennis Hanisak[2], Patricia González-Sánchez[3], Yusimí Alfonso[3], Amanda Ramos[1], Emma E. Gómez[1] y Ana M. Suárez[1].

1- Centro de Investigaciones Marinas-Universidad de La Habana, Playa, La Habana, Cuba.
2- Florida Atlantic University-Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, Fort Pierce, FL, EUA.
3- Acuario Nacional de Cuba, Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente. Playa, La Habana, Cuba.

*Email: beatriz@cim.uh.cu

A joint Cuba-U.S. expedition was conducted on May 14-June 12, 2017 to characterize for the first time the extent and health of mesophotic coral ecosystems (MCEs) along the entire coastline of Cuba. Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) dives at 36 sites between 25-188 m depth confirmed the presence of MCE habitat along all coasts of Cuba. ROV dives documented habitat and macroalgae species. The presence of macroalgae on every MCE habitat around Cuba were confirmed, and 64 taxa of macroalgae (29 Chlorophyta, 25 Rhodophyta, 9 Ochrophya, 1 Cyanophyta) have been identified to date. Macroalgal taxa that were common to all regions of MCEs included the coralline red algae (Subclass Corallinophycidae) and the family Peyssonneliaceae (Rhodophyta); some green unidentified crustose forms, the genera *Halimeda* (particularly *H. copiosa*, *H. goreaui*, *H. tuna*), *Avrainvillea*, *Penicillus*, *Udotea* (particularly *U. cyathiformis*) (Chlorophyta); and the genera *Dictyota* and *Lobophora* (Ochrophyta). The presence of algae was very low on the deep island slope where only CCA and encrusting green and coralline red algae occurred. Between 50-100 m, the algal diversity and cover increased, with *H. copiosa* and coralline red algae dominating. In the upper mesophotic zone (30-50 m), the species richness and cover increased even more, with *Lobophora* spp. and other Dictyotales dominating. Some interesting records of maximum depth of algal occurrence were observed, including an unidentified green crust (169 m), CCA (169 m), Peyssonneliaceae (139 m), *Lobophora* spp. (139 m), and Halimeda spp. (127 m).

Modalidad: Oral, Mesa Redonda