

Scale worm recorded from Lakshadweep

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During an underwater survey in lagoon of Chetlat island Lakshadweep in 2015 a cryptic, commensalistic scale worm association on the sea cucumber *Stichopus chloronotus* was observed. This scale worm was identified as *Gastrolepidia clavigera* Schmarda, 1861 which come under polychaetes (Family:Polynoidae). These are known to inhabit the surface of holothurians in its anterior or posterior ends, and if disturbed crawl into the mouth or cloaca of the sea cucumber. The colour of the scale worm mimics the colour of the host which makes it difficult to be detected. Studies have found that this scale worm species feed on the tissue of the sea cucumber and are resistant to the toxin holothurin which is commonly released by sea cucumbers against predators. Fauvel (1941), Tampi and Rangarajan (1964), Tikader *et al.*(1986) and Marudhupandi *et al.* 2012 have reported earlier on this association of sea cucumber and scale worm from Andaman islands, Rameswaram and Agatti



Close-up view of scale worm

islands. The present report records the enhanced distributional range of this species in the Lakshadweep coral reef ecosystem.