

MARINE MACROALGAL DIVERSITY IN ADMIRALTY BAY, KING GEORGE ISLAND, SOUTH SHETLANDS ISLANDS, ANTARCTICA

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Abstract: The Antarctic Continent is undergoing environmental alterations due to global climate changes and anthropic activities. The knowledge of the biodiversity and of the ecophysiology of the organisms in this region is of essential importance to delineate strategies of protection and for the management of such a fragile region of the planet. Among the organisms to be monitored, the macroalgae are an important natural resource. Admiralty Bay, including the Martel inlet, is an Antarctica Special Management Area (ASMA), which undergoes changes during the year due to the coverage of ice creating perturbed climatic conditions, negatively affecting the macroalgae. Previous studies suggest that Admiralty Bay is an ecotone between the Sub-Antarctic Islands and the coastal zone of Continental Antarctica. This research has the purpose of contributing to the knowledge of the macroalgae clarifying the transitory character of the macroalgal community and its distribution in the bay. From the analysis of the samples of macroalgae collected in the period of December 2010 to February 2011 and from December 2011 to January 2012, it was possible to identify 60 species of algae, of which, 29 Rhodophyta, 14 Chlorophyta and 17 Heterokontophyta. The Ceramiales order (10 species) was the most representative among the Rhodophyta, in that 80% consisted of Delesseriaceae. The presence of Heterokontophyta of large size, such as *Himantothallus grandifolius*, *Phaeurus antarcticus*, *Ascoseira mirabilis* and *Cystophaera jacquinotii*, and the Rhodophyta, *Pyropia endiviifolia* and *Georgiella confluens* confirm the endemic character of these species in Maritime Antarctica and in the Antarctic Peninsula. The Chlorophyta, *Blidingia minima*, *Ulva compressa*, *U. intestinalis* and the Heterokontophyta, *Petalonia fascia* encountered in Admiralty Bay have wide geographical distribution in both hemispheres. In the southern hemisphere, in the Cabo Frio region, of the State of Rio de Janeiro, these species appear fully developed during the summer, a period marked by the occurrence of phenomenon of upwelling, which confirms the connectivity of the Sub-Antarctic waters with the tropical region of the South Atlantic.

Keywords: Admiralty Bay, Antarctica, Macroalgae, Taxonomy

Introduction

Antarctica could be considered the most preserved region in the planet and the most vulnerable to global environmental changes, and it has been defined as the Science Continent.

Although submitted to geographical isolation, this region has been undergoing environmental alterations due to global climate changes and anthropic activities (Reich, 1980). Many



of the global climatic alterations observed today may be related with those that occur in Polar Regions, especially in Antarctica, with repercussions even as far as the North of Brazil. To understand them it is necessary to study their ecosystemic aspects, as much terrestrial as marine. Thus, in the marine ecosystem, the organisms, including the algae, are well adapted to extreme climatic conditions with very low temperatures (Bischoff-Bäsmann & Wiencke, 1996), effects of ice, prolonged freezing of seawater and variations in the periods of solar radiation between winter and summer (Wiencke *et al.*, 2007).

In this context, the knowledge of biodiversity and ecophysiology is of essential importance for delineating the strategies of protection and handling of such a fragile region of the planet. Among the organisms that are being monitored, the macroalgae constitute an important natural resource. Such organisms, formed by a thallus (no roots, stalk, leaves, flowers and fruit), possess great diversity of forms. Colours and dimensions play a fundamental ecological role, in the form of food, shelter, refuge plus spawning ground, which significantly reinforces their role in the ecosystem, as well as in the conservation and preservation of the natural renewable marine resources (Lee, 2008).

Up to the moment 119 species of macroalgae have been registered for the Antarctica region (Wiencke & Clayton, 2002). According to a revision of the bibliography by Pedrini (1992), it was estimated that the Antarctic Peninsula and The South Shetland islands present approximately 82 species. The diversity in the surroundings of the Polish Station Henry Arctowski (Admiralty Bay) was estimated in 36 taxons (Zielinski, 1981; Rakusa-Suszczewski & Zielinski, 1993). However, Oliveira *et al.* (2009) identified 42 species (21 Rhodophyta, 14 Heterokontophyta and 7 Chlorophyta) only in the vicinity of Brazilian Antarctic Station-Comandante Ferraz (Admiralty Bay), corresponding to approximately 31% of the total estimated biodiversity of the whole archipelago of South Shetlands, showing that possibly the macroalgae marine diversity was underestimated for a number of years, especially because all these studies were concentrated in intertidal zones and not shallow infralittoral zones.

It is known that the benthic macroalgae of Antarctica present a high degree endemism in approximately 90% of the Heterokontophyta, 70% of the Rhodophyta and 40% of the Chlorophyta with the majority of species occurring in the peninsula area and there are only a few species registered

in existence further south, for example, in the Ross Sea (Wiencke *et al.*, 2007), suggesting that Admiralty Bay is an ecotone between the Sub-Antarctic Islands and the coastal zone of the Antarctic Continent (Rakusa-Suszczewski & Zielinski, 1993).

The recent phycological studies in Antarctica and the South Atlantic were principally concentrated in the areas of biochemistry and physiology (Amsler *et al.*, 2009; Hoyers *et al.*, 2002; Peters *et al.*, 2002), including those developed by researchers linked to the Brazilian Antarctic Programme, there being few surveys of flora (Pedrini, 1992; Oliveira *et al.*, 2009), however, many gaps related to taxonomy and the life history of some species, especially from the infralittoral areas, still exist (Wiencke *et al.*, 2007; Hommersand *et al.*, 2009).

Admiralty Bay, including Martel inlet, is an Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA), which undergoes changes during the year due to ice coverage creating perturbed climatic conditions, negatively affecting the macroalgae. Thus, the present work has the purpose of contributing to the knowledge of macroalgae, making evident the transitory nature of the macroalgal community and its distribution in the bay.

Materials and Methods

Admiralty Bay (62°04'14,5"-62°10'03,5"S and 58°20'15"-58°27'60"W) is the biggest bay of King George Island, as well as all the other islands of the archipelago of the South Shetlands. This bay is an area of great scientific and environmental interest and is divided in three sectors covered or not by permanent glaciers, which drain their glacial melt water into the bay. The water of the bay occupy 138 km² and communicate to the south by means of the Bransfield Strait and to the North is divided in three fjords forming the inlets of Ezcurra, Mackellar and Martel with depths varying from shallow water of up to 550 metres, with on average 176.3 metres (Rakusa-Suszczewski, 2002). The ice-free areas located along the beach zone and some rock prominences, such as Keller Peninsula, Hennequin Point, Demay Point, and the region of Thomas Point complete Admiralty Bay. In these regions of the intertidal zone and infralittoral shallows predominate rock substrates in the form of pebble stones that can represent an area of development and concentration of biomass for benthic

macroalgae flora (Figures 1-2), which covers 30% of the bottom of the bay (Nedzarek & Rakusa-Suszczewski, 2004) and contributes as a source of organic material for organisms that inhabit this environment.

Seaweed specimens were collected during Austral Summer season from December/2010 to February/2011



Figure 1. General view of the consolidated substrate formed by pebbles at Baleia beach, adjacent to Brazilian Antarctic Station Comandante Ferraz (EACF). (Photo: M.T. Fujii, January/2012).



Figure 2. Detail of the seaweeds attached to the pebbles, during low tide in Botany Point (Photo: M.T. Fujii, January/2012).

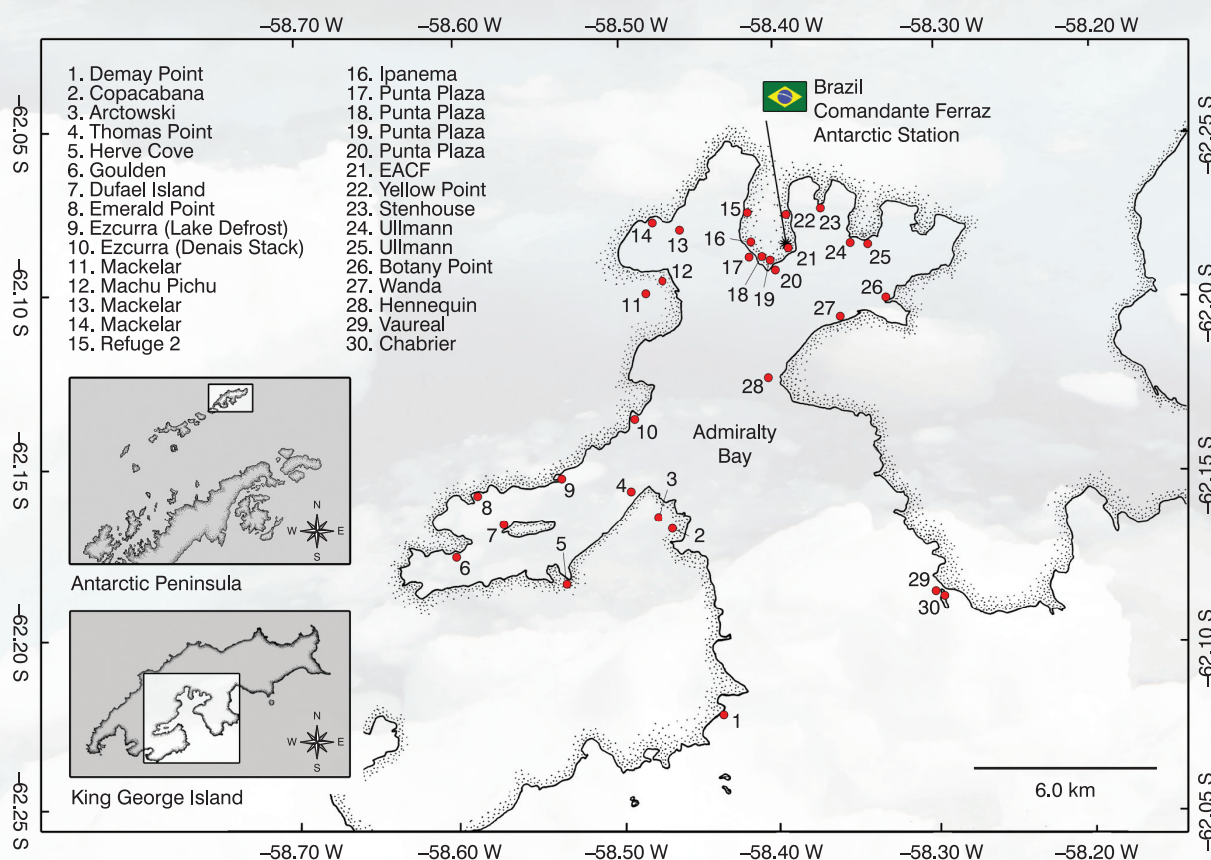


Figure 3. Seaweed sampling sites at Martel, Marckelar and Ezcurra inlets at Admiralty Bay, King George Island, South Shetlands, Antarctic.

collected fixed to consolidated substrate during low tides, as well as by dredging at depths of up to 30 metres, but also washed up on the beaches (Figure 4). Although the presence of calcarian algae encrusted on the consolidated substrate is conspicuous (Figure 5) these were not included in the present study due to the need of a specific methodology to identify this group of algae. The material collected was preserved in a solution of formaldehyde with 4% of sea water for morphological studies and preparation of *vouchers*. For the identification of taxonomy of the macroalgae the standard methodology was followed in Phycology, using longitudinal and transversal sections stained with blue aniline at 0.5% acidity with HCl 1N, whenever necessary, for the better visualization of the diagnostic structures. The exsiccates were included in the Phycological Herbarium of the Botanic Institute in São Paulo (SP).



Figure 4. Drift macroalgae biomass during Summer season of 2011, in front of EACF (Photo: Rafael Bendayan de Moura).



Figure 5. Calcareous seaweeds on the consolidated substrate during low tide at Punta Plaza, Admiralty Bay (Photo: M.T. Fujii, January/2012).

Results

60 taxonomic samples were identified, 29 Rhodophyta, 14 Chlorophyta and 17 Heterokontophyta (Table 1).

Figure 6 shows that the Ceramiales order, with 10 species, is the most representative among the Rhodophyta, in that 80% of the order consists of Delesseriaceae (Table 1).

Discussion and Conclusion

Chlorophyta *Endophyton atroviride* (Figure. 7) develops in the form of small green markings on the thallus of *Iridaea chordata*, showing its affinity, which almost specifies it as host, showing geographical distribution in the regions of Sub-Antarctica and Antarctica (Ricker, 1987).

Green filamentous tufts formed by *Ulothrix flacca*, *U. australis* and *Urospora peniciliformis* were very conspicuous in the higher levels of the intertidal region during the collection of samples, characterising the ambiances of the calm waters of Admiralty Bay (Figure 8). In the northern hemisphere, the heteromorphic life cycle of these species, whose sporophyte corresponds to the *Codiolum* (Druehl, 2000) variety, suggesting a strategy of survival for a period of freezing and absence of light during winter. However, in Admiralty Bay this phase has still not been identified, suggesting that the abiotic conditions can take place in a form and intensity differently from the northern hemisphere.

Prasiola crispa is a green nitrophyla algae which grows forming extensive carpets in the region of penguin rookeries, benefitting from the nitrogen composts originating from the excrements of birds (Figures 9-10). On the other hand, *Prasiola* sp. was found forming extensive carpets in the supralittoral zone, in localities not related to the penguin rookeries. The molecular analyses showed that the latter species is close to *P. stipitata*, however more studies will be necessary to definitively identify the specie (A. Medeiros *et al.* data unpublished). It is also noteworthy, the first indications of *Callophyllis pinnata* (Figure 11) in Admiralty Bay, broadening in this way its area of geographic distribution further south, after recordings by Hoffmann & Santelices (1997) who informed the species in Concepción, Chiloé island and Valdívía on the Chilean coast which is also mentioned in the North American Atlantic Ocean (Abbott & Norris, 1965; Abbott & Hollenberg, 1976; Ramírez & Rojas, 1988; Ramírez & Santelices, 1991).

Table 1. Species of marine algae collected in Admiralty Bay, King George Island, South Shetlands Archipelago, Antarctic, during summer season from December/2010 to February/2011 and from December/2011 to January/2012.

RHODOPHYTA	CHLOROPHYTA				
Bangiales Bangiaceae <i>Porphyra plocamiestris</i> R.W. Ricker <i>Pyropia endiviifolia</i> (A.Gepp & E.Gepp) H.G. Choi & M.S. Hwang Hildenbrandiales Hildenbrandiaceae <i>Hildenbrandia lecanellieri</i> Hariot Bonnemaisoniales Bonnemaisoniaceae <i>Delisea pulchra</i> (Greville) Montagne Palmariales Palmariaceae <i>Palmaria decipiens</i> (Reinsch) R.W. Ricker <i>Palmaria georgica</i> (Reinsch) R.W. Ricker Ceramiales Wrangeliaceae <i>Georgiella confluens</i> (Reinsch) Kylin Delesseriaceae <i>Delesseria lancifolia</i> J. Agardh <i>Delesseria salicifolia</i> Reisch <i>Microrhinus carnosus</i> (Reinsch) Skottsberg <i>Myriogramme manginii</i> (Gain) Skottsberg <i>Neuroglossum delesseriae</i> (Reinsch) M.J. Wynne <i>Phycodrys antarctica</i> (Skottsberg) Skottsberg <i>Phycodrys austrogeorgica</i> Skottsberg <i>Phycodrys quercifolia</i> (Bory) Skottsberg Rhodomelaceae <i>Picconella plumosa</i> (Kylin) J. De Toni Gigartinales Cystocloniaceae <i>Acanthococcus antarcticus</i> J.D. Hooker et Harvey Gigartinaceae <i>Gigartina skottsbergii</i> Setchell & N.L. Gardner <i>Iridaea cordata</i> (Turner) Bory de Saint-Vincent <i>Sarcothalia papillosa</i> (Bory) Leister Kallymeniaceae <i>Callophyllis atosanguinea</i> (J.D.Hooker & Harvey) Hario <i>Callophyllis pinnata</i> Setchell & Swezy Phylloporaceae <i>Gymnogongrus antarcticus</i> Skottsberg <i>Gymnogongrus turquetii</i> Hariot Gracilariales Gracilariaceae <i>Curdiea racovitzae</i> Hariot Halymeniales Halymeniaceae <i>Pachymenia orbicularis</i> (Zanardini) Setchell & N.L. Gardner Plocamiales Plocamiaceae <i>Plocamium cartilagineum</i> (L) P.S. Dixon <i>Plocamium hookeri</i> Harvey Rhodymeniales Rhodymeniaceae <i>Rhodymenia coccocarpa</i> (Montagne) M.J.Wynne	Chaetophorales Chaetophoraceae <i>Endophyton atroviride</i> O'Kelly Ulotrionales Gomontiaceae <i>Monostroma hariatii</i> Gain Ulotrionaceae <i>Protomonostroma undulatum</i> (Wittrock) K.L.Vinogradova <i>Ulothrix australis</i> Gain <i>Ulothrix flacca</i> (Dillwyn) Thuret Ulvaes Kornmanniaceae <i>Blidingia minima</i> (Nägeli ex Kützing) Kylin Ulvaceae <i>Ulva bulbosa</i> (Suhr) Hariot <i>Ulva compressa</i> Linnaeus <i>Ulva intestinalis</i> Linnaeus Prasiolales Prasiolaceae <i>Prasiola crispa</i> (Lightfoot) Kützing <i>Prasiola</i> sp. Acrosiphoniales Acrosiphoniaceae <i>Acrosiphonia arcta</i> (Dillwyn) J. Agardh <i>Urospora penicilliformis</i> (Roth) Areschoug Cladophorales Cladophoraceae <i>Chaetomorpha</i> sp. <tr> <th data-bbox="852 1205 1439 1243">HETEROKONTOPHYTA</th><th></th></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="852 1249 1439 2011"> Syringodermatales Syringodermataceae <i>Syringoderma australe</i> Levring Fucales Seirococcaceae <i>Cystosphaera jacquiniotii</i> (Montagne) Skottsberg Ectocarpales Chordariaceae <i>Haplogloia moniliformis</i> Ricker <i>Haplogloia andersonii</i> (Farlow) Levring <i>Elachista antarctica</i> Skottsberg Acinetosporaceae <i>Geminocarpus austrogeorgiae</i> Skottsberg <i>Geminocarpus geminatus</i> (Hooker & Harvey) Skottsberg <i>Pylaiella littoralis</i> (L.) Kjellman Adenocystaceae <i>Adenocystis utricularis</i> (Bory) Skottsberg Scytosiphonaceae <i>Petalonia fascia</i> (O. F. Müller) Kuntze Desmarestiales Desmarestiaceae <i>Desmarestia anceps</i> Montagne <i>Desmarestia antarctica</i> R.L. Moe & P.C. Silva <i>Desmarestia confervoides</i> (Bory) M.E. Ramirez & A.F. Peters <i>Desmarestia menziesii</i> J Agardh <i>Himantothallus grandifolius</i> (A and E Gepp) Zinova <i>Phaeurus antarcticus</i> Skottsberg Ascoseirales Ascoseiraceae <i>Ascoseira mirabilis</i> Skottsberg </td><td></td></tr>	HETEROKONTOPHYTA		Syringodermatales Syringodermataceae <i>Syringoderma australe</i> Levring Fucales Seirococcaceae <i>Cystosphaera jacquiniotii</i> (Montagne) Skottsberg Ectocarpales Chordariaceae <i>Haplogloia moniliformis</i> Ricker <i>Haplogloia andersonii</i> (Farlow) Levring <i>Elachista antarctica</i> Skottsberg Acinetosporaceae <i>Geminocarpus austrogeorgiae</i> Skottsberg <i>Geminocarpus geminatus</i> (Hooker & Harvey) Skottsberg <i>Pylaiella littoralis</i> (L.) Kjellman Adenocystaceae <i>Adenocystis utricularis</i> (Bory) Skottsberg Scytosiphonaceae <i>Petalonia fascia</i> (O. F. Müller) Kuntze Desmarestiales Desmarestiaceae <i>Desmarestia anceps</i> Montagne <i>Desmarestia antarctica</i> R.L. Moe & P.C. Silva <i>Desmarestia confervoides</i> (Bory) M.E. Ramirez & A.F. Peters <i>Desmarestia menziesii</i> J Agardh <i>Himantothallus grandifolius</i> (A and E Gepp) Zinova <i>Phaeurus antarcticus</i> Skottsberg Ascoseirales Ascoseiraceae <i>Ascoseira mirabilis</i> Skottsberg	
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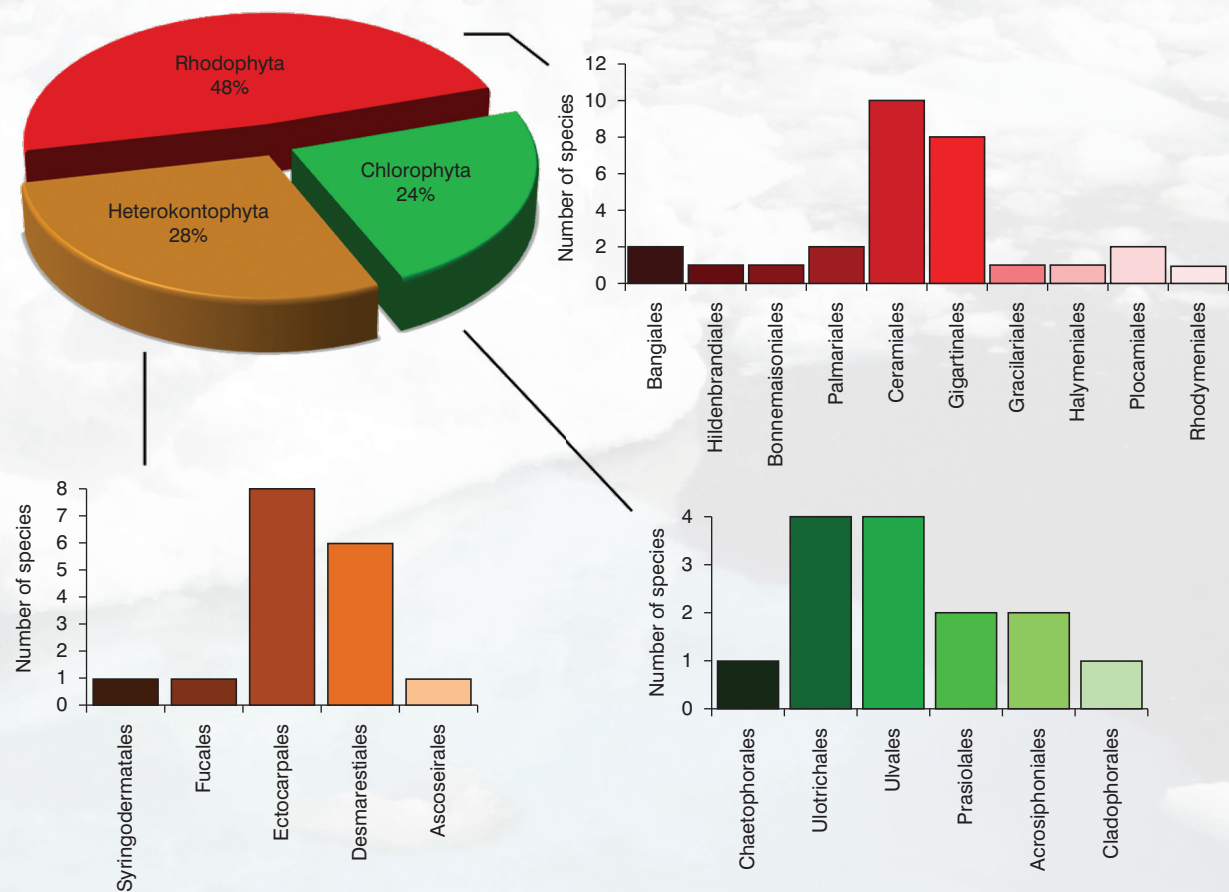


Figure 6. Diversity of marine macroalgae in admiralty bay.



Figure 7. *Endophyton atroviride* growing in the thallus of rhodophycean *Iridaea chordata*.



Figure 8. Green filamentous algae formed by *Ulothrix flacca*, *U. australis* e *Urospora penicilliformis* are frequently observed growing on the upper portion of intertidal zone of Admiralty Bay.



Figure 9. Penguin colony in the Polish Station Arctowski.



Figure 10. Population of *Prasiola crispa* growing in a wetland under the influence of penguin droppings.

The presence of Heterokontophyta of large size such as, *Himantothallus grandifolius*, *Phaeurus antarcticus*, *Ascoseira mirabilis*, *Cystophaera jacquinotii*, and linked to the Rhodophyta *Pyropia endiviifoliae* and *Georgiella confluens* confirm the endemic characteristic of this species in Maritime Antarctica and in the Antarctica Peninsula (Clayton, 1994; Wiencke & Clayton, 2002). In Admiralty Bay, Oliveira *et al.* (2009) 42 species distributed as follows were found: 21 Rhodophyta, 14 Heterokontophyta and 7 Chlorophyta. Of the species informed by these authors *Porphyra woolhouseae* Agardh, *Notophycus fimbriatus* R.L. Moe, *Plocamium* aff. *secundatum*, *Ballia callitrichia* (C. Agardh) Kützinger and *Desmarestia chordalis* J.D. Hooker & Harvey were found in the course of the present study. On the other hand, in the collecting that took place in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, the diversity was greater in comparison with that obtained by Oliveira *et al.* (2009), through the register of a further eighteen species (*Palmaria georgica*, *Callophyllis pinnata*, *Acanthococcus antarcticus*, *Sarcothalia papillosa*, *Plocamium hookerii*, *Rhodomenia coccocarpa*, *Delesseria salicifolia*, *Myriogramme mangini*, *Phycodrys antarctica*, *P. austrogeorgica*, *Desmarestia confervoides*, *Syringoderma australis*, *Endophyton atroviride*, *Ulothrix flacca*, *Blidingia minima*, *Ulva compressa*, *U. intestinalis* and *Chaetomorpha* sp.).

The Chlorophyta *Blidingia minima*, *Ulva compressa*, *U. intestinalis* and the Heterokontophyta *Petalonia fascia* found in Admiralty Bay have wide geographic distribution in both hemispheres. In the southern hemisphere, in the region



Figure 11. *Callophyllis pinnata* identified from macroalgae collected in Admiralty Bay.

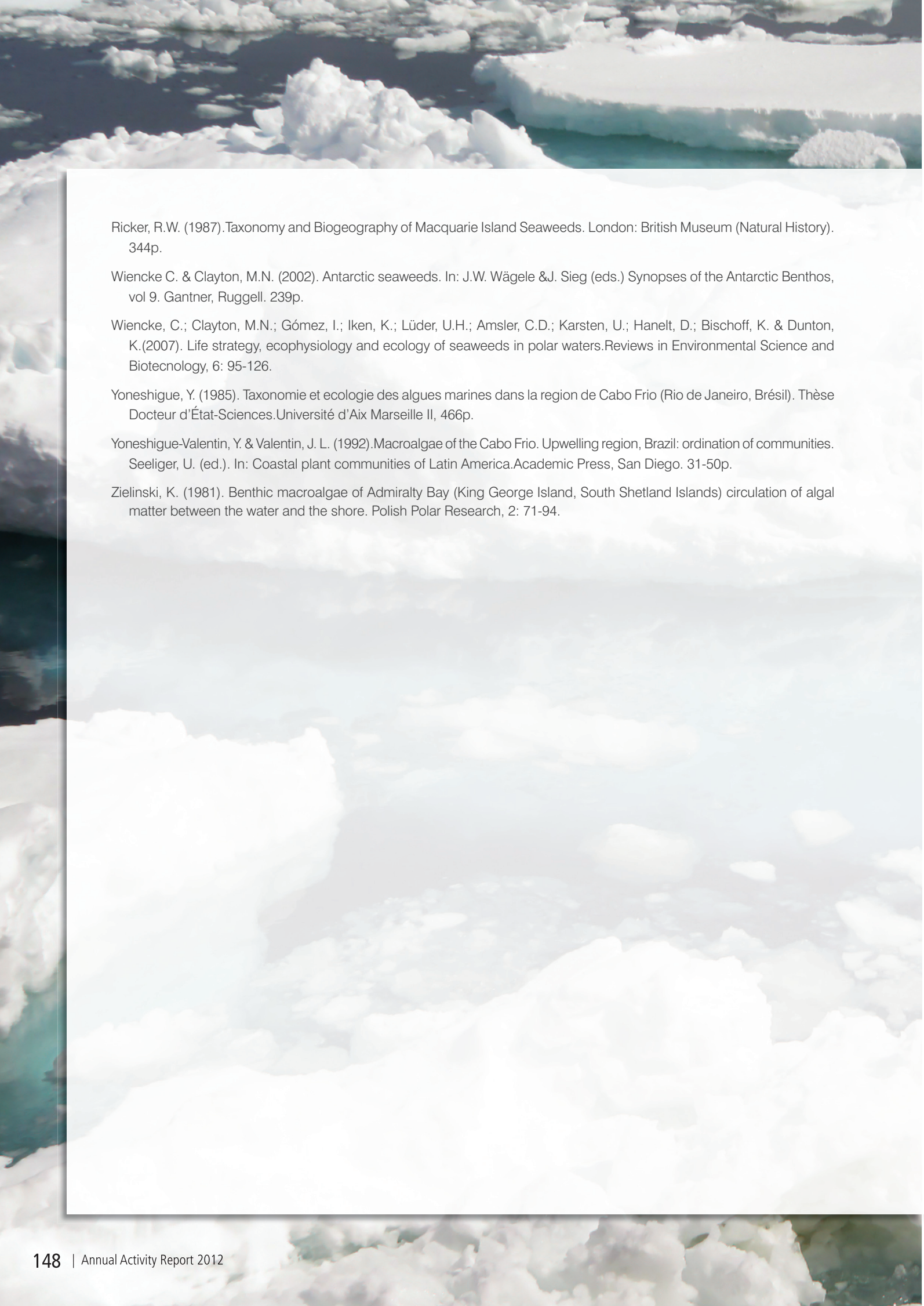
of Cabo Frio, State of Rio de Janeiro, these species appear fully developed during the summer, a period marked by the occurrence of a resurgence phenomenon (Yoneshigue, 1985; Yoneshigue-Valentin & Valentin, 1992; Reis & Yoneshigue-Valentin, 1996), which confirms the connectivity of the Sub-Antarctic waters with the tropical region of the South Atlantic.

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