

***Sphaeroma walkeri* Stebbing, 1905 (Crustacea: Isopoda: Sphaeromatidae) established on the Mediterranean coast of Israel**

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Abstract

The isopod *Sphaeroma walkeri* is one of the most widely ship-transported alien species in the world, and was first recorded in the Mediterranean during the earlier part of the last century. Although this species has been mentioned in passing from the Israeli coast the present record suggests that *S. walkeri* is established in the region.

Key words: *Sphaeroma walkeri*, Isopoda, Mediterranean, Israel, fouling, alien

On 5 February, 2008, the research vessel of the National Institute of Oceanography, *Shikmona*, was dry docked in Haifa Harbour and its hull inspected for fouling. The hull was bare but for small areas near its propeller, and stripes along its bottom where the vessel had been supported during its previous visit to the dry dock facilities in February, 2004 and lacked antifouling paint. The fouled areas were photographed, scraped and preserved in 10% buffered formaldehyde. Several specimens of *Sphaeroma walkeri* Stebbing, 1905 (Figure 1) were found inside empty shells of *Balanus trigonus* Darwin, 1854. They agree with the description and figures provided by Jacobs (1987). Two adult specimens were deposited in the National Collections, Tel Aviv University (TAU AR 28562).



Figure 1. *Sphaeroma walkeri* Stebbing, 1905. Specimen (CL 8.6 mm) collected inside empty shells of *Balanus trigonus* Darwin, 1854, Haifa Harbour, Israel (TAU AR 28562)

Sphaeroma walkeri is a thermophilic isopod considered indigenous to the Indian Ocean. It is commonly found in intertidal fouling communities and has been widely reported from ports in warm and warm-temperate waters worldwide (Carlton and Iverson 1981; Mak et al. 1985). The earliest records of *S. walkeri* in the Mediterranean date back to 1924 and 1933, and were collected in Port Said, and Alexandria, Egypt, off ships' hulls (Omer-Cooper 1927; Larwood 1940). In 1976 it was found in the Gulf of Izmir (Kocataş 1978), and subsequently in Toulon, France in 1977 (Zibrowius 1992), Alicante, Spain in 1981 (Jacobs 1987), and the Port of Radès and the lagoon of Tunis, Tunisia in 2003 (Ben Souissi et al. 2003). But the species had been recorded even earlier from the port of Suez (Stebbing 1910) and the Suez Canal (Omer-Cooper 1927; Monod 1933), where it had been taken from ships' hulls.

Glynn (1972: 295) mentioned that *S. walkeri* was sampled "in the intertidal zone at 'Akko'" at the northern end of Haifa Bay in 1971. The recent finding placed it at Haifa port in the southern end of the bay. The species has most likely been introduced to Haifa Bay by shipping. However, the route of invasion is unknown. It may have arrived on fouled vessels from faraway ports in the Indian Ocean, Australia, or the Americas, all of which maintain frequent shipping connections with Haifa Port, or, it may originate from the long-established population in the Suez Canal.

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