



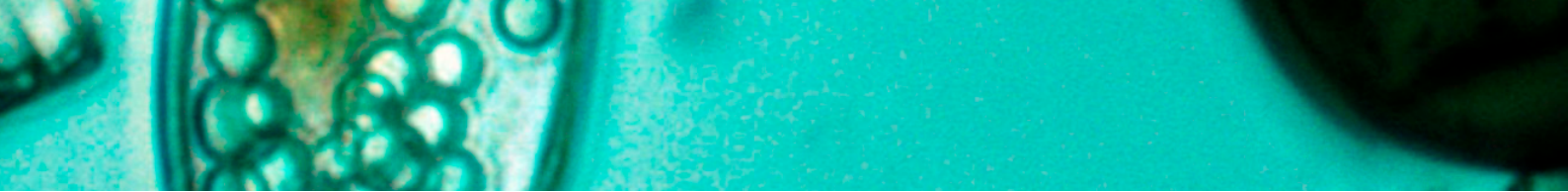
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SYM09: A future for algal taxonomy: challenges and prospects

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THE GENUS *SARGASSUM* IN THE CANARY ISLANDS: PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF ITS DIVERSITY

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The genus *Sargassum* C.A.Gardh, with over 500 described species and around 350 of them accepted taxonomically, represents almost one sixth of the species in the class *Phaeophyceae*. Species are distributed worldwide, being an especially important component of tropical and subtropical regions where they play the role of habitat forming species. Identification can be specially challenging, as they show great morphological variability. Only in the north Atlantic Ocean more than 30 species are recognized. Recent molecular studies combined with extensive morphological assessments are clearing up the relationships and actual diversity of this genus. The aim of this study was to assess a preliminary diversity of *Sargassum* in the Canary Islands based on bibliographical compilation, morphological examination of herbaria material and extensive field collections to characterize the distribution and morphological variability of the different species, as a first step to clarify the actual diversity of this genus using molecular techniques. From the species considered accepted for the region, only 6 have been confirmed with recent field collections and from the examined herbaria material, and 1 species has been found for the first time in the Canaries. Also, new morphotypes have been found that are not consistent with any species described for this region, and further studies will allow us to assess its identification.

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