

# *Athyonidium chilensis*

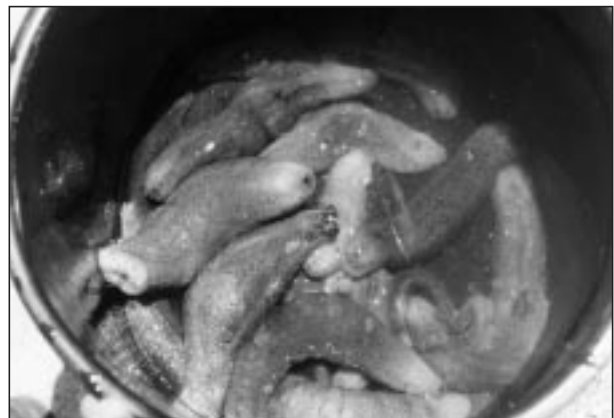
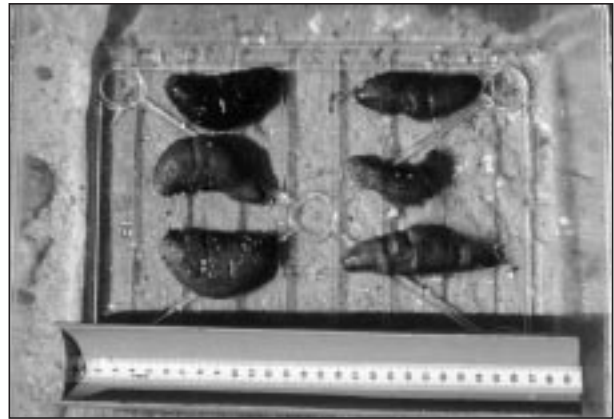
Carlos Ravest Presa<sup>1</sup>

*Athyonidium chilensis* (Dendrochirotida; Cucumariidae) (Figures 1 and 2) is distributed between Ancón, in Peru, and Punta Gaviota, in Chile (11°45'S and 42°03'S, respectively).

*A. chilensis* has been collected in the exposed intertidal area between rocky pools, and from the sand where it extends its tentacles over the surface of the bottom. High biomass has also been found in the sandy subtidal area, though this could be related to reproductive migration because only large individuals were found. *A. chilensis* is a non-selective filter-feeder and its action is of great importance due to the predation of larvae, shepherding of algae, filtering of plankton and the recycling of organic particles. A length/weight relationship of *A. chilensis* is given in Figure 3.

In Chile, this resource has scarcely been studied or exploited. There is some information regarding a toxin observed in *A. chilensis* that inhibits the settlement of other animals near it, although it could also be utilised as an alert signal because the other animals immediately retract their tentacles in its presence. Its reproductive cycle has also been studied, specifically in relationship with the annual cycle of its gonadic index.

Other studies regarding ecological and larval aspects have been carried out, but this information is unavailable. It seems that this species of holothurid has a low commercial value, even though the interest in mono-specific fisheries in cold waters has increased steadily. Nevertheless, its aquaculture potential is interesting due to the fact that it could be the source of a natural product, or, in great abundance, could be used as a biological filter of organic particles in the discharges from fish farms.



Figures 1 & 2. *Athyonidium chilensis*

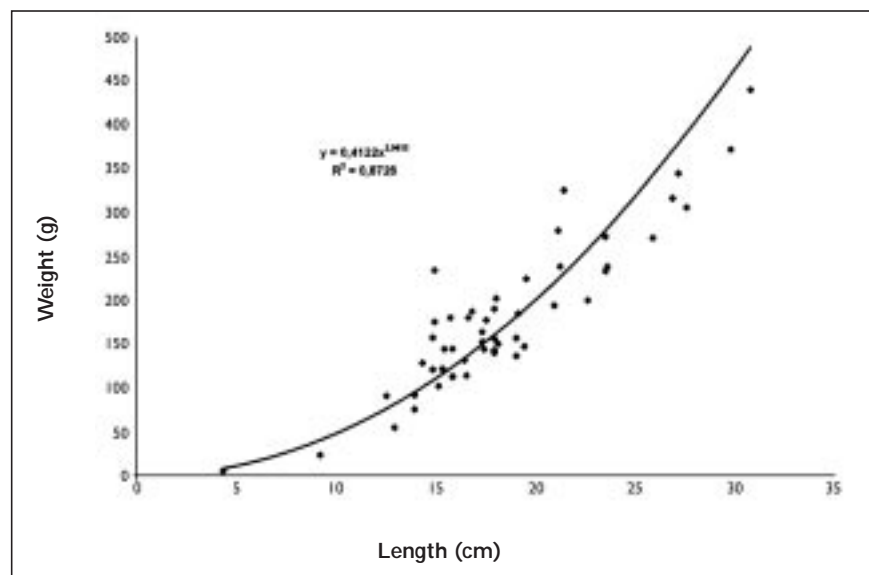


Figure 3. *Athyonidium chilensis* length/weight relationship

1. Universidad de Valparaíso, Instituto de Oceanología, P.O. Box 13 D, Viña del Mar, CHILE. E-mail: racor@chilesat.net