Occurrence of Cochlodinium fulvescens (Gymnodiniales: Dinophyceae) in the southwestern Gulf of California

Ismael Gárate-Lizárraga 1

1 Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Centro Interdisciplinario de Ciencias Marinas, Departamento de Plancton y Ecología Marina, Apartado postal 592, La Paz, B.C.S. 23000, México. igarate@ipn.mx

Abstract.- The naked dinoflagellate Cochlodinium fulvescens was rarely observed in Bahía de La Paz since 2008. Sporadic observations were made in 2010 and 2012. The species re-appeared from October 2012 to April 2013. Abundance of C. fulvescens ranged from 600 to 45,800 cells L⁻¹ during this period in seawater temperature at 22-27°C and salinity of 35.25-35.75. This species appeared as single cells or two-celled chains and co-occurred with Cochlodinium polykrikoides at the end of the bloom. C. fulvescens usually occurs in autumn to spring and C. polykrikoides usually occurs in spring to autumn. The main distinguishing morphological characters between these two species are the relative position of the cingulum and sulcus and the morphology of chloroplasts. This provided reliable identification of live cells. Other Cochlodinium species, such as C. faurei, C. pulchellum, and C. rosaceum were also observed in the bay.

Key words: Dinoflagellates, Cochlodinium fulvescens, Cochlodinium polykrikoides, southwestern Gulf of California

INTRODUCTION

The genus Cochlodinium belongs to the order Gymnodiniales Lemmermann, 1910. Cochlodinium is an unarmored, marine planktonic dinoflagellate with a distinctive spiral-shaped cingulum of 1.5 or more gyres around the cell. Some photosynthetic Cochlodinium species form cell chains. According to the recent worldwide review of marine dinoflagellates (Gómez 2011), there are 35 species of Cochlodinium. Cochlodinium fulvescens Iwataki, Kawami & Matsuoka, 2007 was recently described as a new species (Iwataki et al. 2007). Taxonomy and distribution of Cochlodinium species have occasionally been studied in Mexico. Twelve species of Cochlodinium have been found in Pacific coastal waters of Mexico (Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2004, 2009a, b; 2011; Cortés-Lara et al. 2004, Okolodkov & Gárate-Lizárraga 2006, Morquecho-Escamilla & Alonso-Rodríguez 2008, Gárate-Lizárraga 2013). In these reports, massive blooms of Cochlodinium polykrikoides Margalef, 1961 have been recorded along the west coast of Mexico (Morales-Blake et al. 2001, Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2004, 2009b). Cochlodinium fulvescens has been reported in lagoons and bays along the southern Gulf of California (Morquecho-Escamilla & Alonso-Rodríguez 2008, Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2009a). Recently, other species of Cochlodinium, including C. convolutum Kofoid & Swezy, 1921, C. helicoides Lebour, 1925, C. helix Schütt, 1895, Cochlodinium pulchellum Lebour, 1917, and Cochlodinium virescens Kofoid & Swezy, 1921, have been recorded for the first time (Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2011, Gárate-Lizárraga 2012). The purpose of this study was to describe the seasonal occurrence of Cochlodinium fulvescens in Bahía de La Paz, Gulf of California.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bahía de La Paz is the largest bay on the peninsular side of the Gulf of California. The bay constantly exchanges water with the Gulf of California via a northern and a southern opening (Gómez-Valdés et al. 2003). As part of a continuing toxic or harmful microalgae monitoring program, 56 phytoplankton bottle samples were monthly collected from January 2010 to April 2013 at a fixed sampling station in Bahía de La Paz (Fig. 1), in the State of Baja California Sur (24°21’N, 110°31’W). Two-day samplings were performed each month from October 2012 to April 2013. Two horizontal tows, using a 20 μm mesh net with 50 cm diameter, were performed. Samples were immediately fixed with acid Lugol’s solution and preserved with 4% formalin. Live phytoplankton samples were used to identify Cochlodinium species. Cochlodinium cell counts were made in 5 mL settling chambers under an inverted, phase-contrast microscope (Carl Zeiss,
Oberkochen, Germany) (Utermöhl 1958). Sea surface temperature was recorded with a bucket thermometer. Salinity was measured with a refractometer (Model STX3, Vee Gee Scientific, Kirkland, WA). A compound microscope was used to measure cells and a digital camera (Konus Italia Group, Verona, Italy) was used to record images.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During this investigation, only 13 samplings were C. fulvescens positive, occurring in a temperature range of 22-27°C and salinity of 35.25-35.75 (Table 1). These specimens were either solitary (Figs. 2A-C) or two-cell chains (Figs. 2D-F). No four-cell chains were observed. The specimens fit well with the diagnosis and description of Iwataki et al. (2007). Cells are rounded and ellipsoidal in shape (Figs. 2A-C; D-F). The cingulum encircles the cell twice; the sulcus runs down apart from the cingulum (Figs. 2 B-C). A reddish-orange pigmented body is located at the dorsal side of the epicone (Figs. 2 B-C). The nucleus is spherical and located at the anterior part of the epicone (Fig. 2A). Chloroplasts are granular and distributed along the cingulum and the periphery of the cell. The specimens appear pale yellow. Cells were 32-55 μm long and 25-38 μm wide (n = 30). C. fulvescens became round (Fig. 2G) when preserved with Lugol’s solution.

Abundance of C. fulvescens was low (400-1600 cells L⁻¹) during samplings from 2010 through 2011, reaching peak densities of 4000-6600 cells L⁻¹ in December 2012 (Table 1). An increase in abundance occurred from January through April 2013, reaching moderate densities ranging from 27,800 to 45,800 cells L⁻¹. Other Cochlodinium species were found in net phytoplankton samples from 2013. Three specimens of Cochlodinium faurei Kofoid & Swezy, 1921 were also found in net phytoplankton samples collected in January 2013 (Fig. 2H). The cells are medium-sized with a sub-ovoid to ellipsoid body. Cells were 60-64 μm long and 35-38 μm wide. The cytoplasm is finely granular, but usually very clear and transparent. This finding is the first record for Bahía de La Paz. Four encysted specimens of C. pulchellum Lebour, 1917 were observed in net samples in 24 February 2013. They were small-sized, reaching a total length of 38-44 μm, with an asymmetrical fusiform body (Fig. 2I). This species was also reported earlier in Bahía de La Paz (Gárate-Lizárraga 2011). Two specimens of Cochlodinium rosaceum Kofoid and Swezy, 1921 were found in net phytoplankton samples collected in April 2013; it is a medium-sized species with an ellipsoid, rose-

Table 1. Abundance of Cochlodinium fulvescens, temperature and salinity data in 13 samplings performed in Bahía de La Paz, from October 2010 through April 2013 / Datos de abundancia de Cochlodinium fulvescens, temperatura y salinidad en 13 muestreos realizados en Bahía de La Paz, de octubre 2010 hasta abril 2013

<table>
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<th>Sampling dates</th>
<th>Cell abundance (cells L⁻¹)</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/24/2011</td>
<td>400-800</td>
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<td>800-1400</td>
<td>22</td>
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Figure 2. Light microphotographs of *Cochlodinium fulvescens*, *Cochlodinium faurei*, *Cochlodinium pulchellum*, *Cochlodinium rosaseum* and *Cochlodinium polykrikoides* from Bahía de La Paz. A-C) Three single cells of *Cochlodinium fulvescens* showing the nucleus (n), flagellum (black arrow), and stigma (white arrow); D-F) Three two-celled chains of *Cochlodinium fulvescens*; G) Two-celled chain of *Cochlodinium fulvescens* fixed with Lugol’s solution; H) Specimen of *Cochlodinium faurei*; I) Hyaline cyst of *Cochlodinium pulchellum*; J) Specimen of *Cochlodinium rosaseum*; K) Single cell of *Cochlodinium polykrikoides* showing stigma (white arrow) and the rod-shaped chloroplasts (yellow arrow); L) Two-cell chain of *Cochlodinium polykrikoides*, showing the reddish orange pigmented body (white arrow), the rod-shaped chloroplasts (yellow arrow), and longitudinal flagellum (black arrow).
colored cell (Fig. 2J), and 68-70 μm long and of 32-34 μm wide. Specimens of *C. rosaceum* fit well with the description by Kofoid & Swezy (1921). This is the first record of this species along the Pacific coast of Mexico.

*Cochlodinium fulvescens* is a bloom-forming dinoflagellate first found in Tachibana Bay (west Japan), Hunan Bay (South Sumatra), Indonesia (Iwataki et al. 2007), British Columbia (Iwataki et al. 2008), California (Iwataki et al. 2008, Curtiss et al. 2008, Kudela & Golber 2012), and the Gulf of California (Morquecho-Escamilla & Alonso-Rodríguez 2008, Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2009a). Recently *C. fulvescens* was also reported in the Bahía de Acapulco (Meave del Castillo et al. 2012) and coastal waters of Karachi bordering the northern Arabian Sea (Munir et al. 2008). The presence of an eyespot was demonstrated for *C. polykrikoides* by TEM in Iwataki et al. (2010). A similar position was reported for the phylogenetically related species *C. fulvescens* (Iwataki et al. 2007). *C. polykrikoides* has numerous rod-shaped chloroplasts which extended longitudinally in healthy cells and were brownish-green in color (Fig. 2L). Meanwhile, *C. fulvescens* has granular chloroplasts that are distributed along the cingulum and the periphery of the cell. Blooms of *C. polykrikoides* have become recurrent events in Bahía de La Paz (Gárate-Lizárraga 2013); the most recent occurred from August through October 2013. In samples from October 2012, *C. polykrikoides* occurred with *C. fulvescens*, with densities of 12800-24,600 cells L⁻¹ for the former and 1200-1600 cells L⁻¹ for the latter. The 2 species were previously coupled in the Bahía de La Paz in June 2008 (Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2009a). There is clear overlap in the preferred temperature range of the 2 species in Bahía de La Paz; *C. polykrikoides* is common at 20-31°C and *C. fulvescens* at 22-27°C. Our results partly coincide with the work of Munir et al. (2012), with low densities of *C. fulvescens* at < 26°C and high densities at 31-32°C. Kudela & Golber (2012) and Howard et al. (2012) state that cells of *C. fulvescens* are present at low temperatures (14-18°C). Comparing salinity, *C. fulvescens* was common at 35.25-35.75 in the Gulf of California, but Kudela & Golber (2012) report that *C. fulvescens* was common at 32.8-33.6 off the coast of California.

In Bahía de La Paz, monitoring of live microalgae specimens that form red tides started in 2000, during a bloom of *C. polykrikoides* (Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2004). Since that time, many microalgae bearing a soft cell membrane, such as dinoflagellates and raphidophytes, have been identified (Gárate-Lizárraga et al. 2004, 2009c; Gárate-Lizárraga 2013). Proper identification of several *Cochlodinium* species in Bahía de La Paz is a good example of the importance of working with fresh samples. The morphology of *Cochlodinium* species changes during observation under a light microscope. Likewise, cells tend to form a hyaline membrane around the cell or a temporary hyaline cyst (Fig. 2I); otherwise, they would explode. Specimens showing those features were fixed with Lugol’s solution and could not be properly identified. Hence, live samples are important in the study of *Cochlodinium* species and other naked dinoflagellates.

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**LITERATURE CITED**


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