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***Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov., a new genus and a new species of Rhynchomolgidae (Copepoda: Cyclopoida) collected by light trap in the marine cave (Turtle Tomb) of Sipadan Island, Sabah, Malaysia**

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Abstract. A new species of the copepod lichomolgoid complex is described from a male specimen collected in a marine cave (Turtle Tomb) on Sipadan Island, Sabah, Malaysia. The new species is assigned to the family Rhynchomolgidae Humes & Stock, 1972 based primarily on the morphology of the antenna, mandible, maxilla, and endopods of swimming legs 1 and 3. The distinctive configuration of the mandible, male antennule, and third swimming leg supports the establishment of a new genus, *Sipadanomolgus* gen. nov., to accommodate the new species. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov. is named in reference to its distinctive morphology, particularly the unique combination of antennular setation and swimming leg 3 armature, which distinguishes it from other genera of Rhynchomolgidae.

Keywords. New genus, Lichomolgoidea, marine cave, Turtle Tomb, Sipadan, Southeast Asia.

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Introduction

The lichomolgoid complex, as referred to by several authors, including López-González *et al.* (1999), Ho & Kim (1997), and Huys (2001), is a group of symbiotic Cyclopoida Burmeister, 1834 that commonly live in association with marine invertebrates and many have a modified or transformed body form. Its

members were previously assigned to the superfamily Lichomolgoidea Humes & Stock, 1972, which is no longer recognized in the current taxonomic classification of Copepoda Milne-Edwards, 1840.

According to Humes & Stock (1972, 1973), five families were included within the superfamily Lichomolgoidea: Sabelliphiidae Gurney, 1927; Lichomolgidae Kossmann, 1877; Urocopiidae Humes & Stock, 1972; Pseudanthessiidae Humes & Stock, 1972; and Rhynchomolgidae Humes & Stock, 1972. In a subsequent taxonomic revision of the superfamily by Humes & Boxshall (1996), six additional families were established: Anchimolgidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996; Kelleriidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996; Macrochironidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996; Octopicolidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996; Synapticolidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996; and Thamnomolgidae Humes & Boxshall, 1996. Near the end of the last century, a new family, Polyankyliidae Ho & Kim, 1997, was proposed and recognized as a member of the complex by Ho & Kim (1997). Humes & Boxshall (1996) argued that the affinity of Urocopiidae lies more with the family Sapphirinidae Thorell, 1860, rather than with those of the families included in the superfamily by Humes & Stock (1972, 1973); as a result, it was excluded from the revision of the superfamily. However, both the Urocopiidae and Sapphirinidae have been included within the complex by Boxshall & Halsey (2004). So, thirteen families were recognized as members of the lichomolgoid complex by Boxshall & Halsey (2004).

In 1993, the discovery of the pseudanthessiid copepod *Sipadania celerinae* Humes & Lane, 1993, from the asteroid *Celerina heffernani* (Livingstone, 1931) inhabiting the reef wall of Pulau Sipadan, marked the first description of a copepod species from the island. More recently, biospeleological exploration of the marine cave known as Turtle Tomb has revealed an unexpectedly rich and still largely undocumented crustacean fauna. These investigations have resulted in the discovery of the calanoid copepod *Sipadantonius* Boonyanusith, Wongkamhaeng & Azman, 2024, the harpacticoid copepod *Peltidium penyu* Boonyanusith *et al.*, 2026, and the cave-dwelling mysid *Palaumysis jetama* Azman *et al.*, 2026, all of which were previously unknown to science (Boonyanusith *et al.* 2024, 2026; Azman *et al.* 2026). Collectively, these discoveries suggest that Turtle Tomb represents an important hotspot of subterranean marine biodiversity within the Coral Triangle, with its crustacean fauna remaining far from fully documented despite the global prominence of Sipadan Island as one of the world's prime diving destinations. Continuing this series of discoveries, examination of copepod material collected using a light trap in Turtle Tomb revealed an undescribed lichomolgoid, represented by a single male specimen. Although the female remains unknown, the morphology of the mandible, antenna, maxilla, and the endopods of swimming legs 1 and 3 clearly indicates an affinity with the family Rhynchomolgidae. However, the unique combination of characters exhibited by the mandible, male antennule, and swimming leg 3 cannot be accommodated within any known genus. We therefore establish *Sipadanomolgus* gen. nov. to accommodate this distinctive new species, which is described and illustrated below.

Material and Methods

Plankton sampling was conducted in Turtle Tomb on Sipadan Island (Fig. 1), Sabah, Malaysia, on 3 August 2023, using a modified light trap set just above the cave floor (depth of 20–24 m below the sea level) for ~24 h. The samples were then preserved in 10% buffered formalin. Copepod samples were sorted under a stereo microscope, followed by fixation and storage in 70% ethanol. Before morphological examination, the specimen was soaked in a mixture of glycerol and 70% ethanol (approximate ratio 1/10 v/v) for 30 min and was then transferred into a drop of 40% glycerol on a glass slide. The habitus was examined and drawn under a Nikon ECLIPSE E200 compound light microscope attached to the drawing tube. The specimen was subsequently dissected under a stereo microscope and mounted by a coverslip. The appendages were examined and drawn at a magnification of 1000 ×.

The description follows the terminology in Boxshall & Halsey (2004), except for that of the seta on the maxilla, which follows Humes & Boxshall (1996).

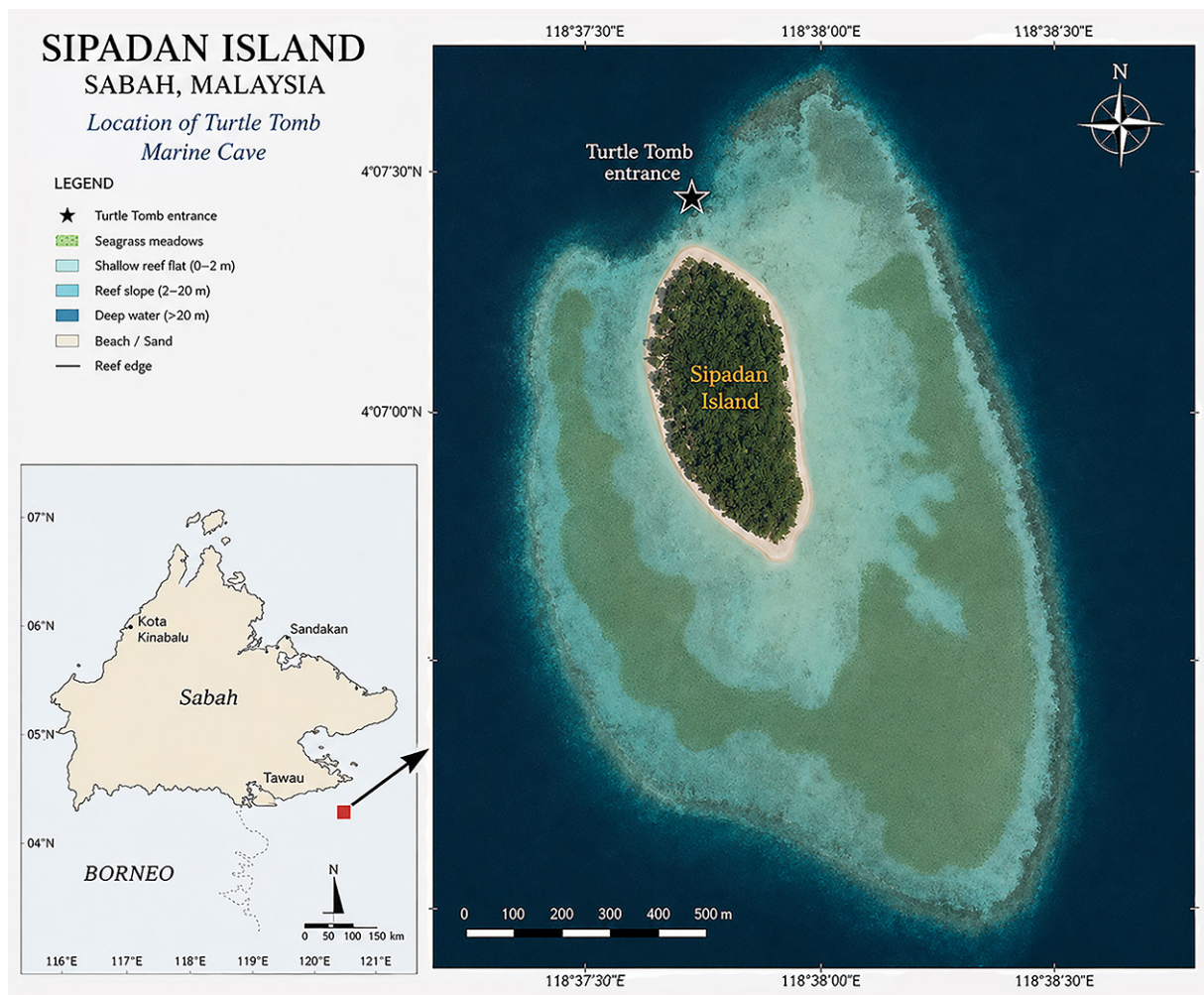


Fig. 1. Location of Turtle Tomb Marine Cave, Sipadan Island, Sabah, Malaysia. The inset map shows the location of Sipadan Island within Sabah, northern Borneo, while the main map indicates the Turtle Tomb entrance and surrounding reef habitats, including shallow reef flats, reef slopes, and deeper waters.

Specimen repositories

The type material has been deposited at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Muzium Zoologi (UKMMZ), Malaysia (in accordance to the requirements stated in the Sabah Biodiversity Council–License for Transfer Ref. No. JKM/MBS.1000-2/3 JLD.5 [41]).

Results

Taxonomic accounts

Class Copepoda Milne-Edwards, 1840
Order Cyclopoida Burmeister, 1834
Family Rhynchomolgidae Humes & Stock, 1972

Genus *Sipadanomolgus* gen. nov.

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Diagnosis

Male

Body cyclopiform. Prosome comprising cephalosome and four pedigerous somites; first pedigerous somite fused to cephalosome forming cephalothorax with suture marking plane of fusion. Urosome six-segmented. Caudal rami with six setae. Antennule seven-segmented, without geniculation; segments 3 and 4 each with four setae; armature formula: 4, 13 + 2 aesthetascs, 4, 4 + 1 aesthetasc, 2 + 1 aesthetasc, 7 + 1 aesthetasc. Antenna four-segmented; first and second endopodal segments each with one minute seta; third endopodal segment longer than the second one, with six elements including two well-developed terminal claws. Labrum deeply incised. Mandible with elongate tapering lash; inner margin with conical projection ornamented with short row of slim spinules; proximal notch well-defined but shallow; outer scales minute and incorporated. Maxillule represented by single lobe with one apical, one subapical, and one minute seta. Maxilla with basis drawn out into tapering lash ornamented with row of graduated spinules on upper side and bearing three elements; seta II relatively long, reaching distal $\frac{2}{3}$ of basis. Maxilliped four-segmented and subchelate, with large terminal claw; setal formula 0, 2, 0, 1 + 1 claw. Swimming legs 1–4 with three-segmented rami, except endopod of leg 4 which is two-segmented; leg 3 with two spines on third endopodal segment; leg 4 with exopod and endopod having armature formulae: I-0, I-1, III-I-5 and 0-1, 0-I-0, respectively. Leg 5 with free exopodal segment bearing two terminal setae; protopodal segment incorporated to somite, represented by a seta. Leg 6 reduced to simple cuticular plate, with two setae.

Etymology

The generic name stems from the combination of two words: ‘Sipadan’, which refers to the place where the new species was discovered, and ‘*molgus*’, derived from the Greek word ‘molgós’ which means ‘leather bag’ or ‘wineskin’ and is often used in forming generic names of the lichomolgoid complex.

Type and only species

Sipadanomolgus dissimilis sp. nov.

Sipadanomolgus dissimilis gen. et sp. nov.

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Figs 2–6

Etymology

The specific epithet ‘*dissimilis*’ is derived from the Latin prefix ‘*dis-*’ (‘apart’ or ‘different’) and the Latin adjective ‘*similis*’ (‘similar’ or ‘alike’), meaning ‘dissimilar’ or ‘unlike’, alluding to the difference in the setation pattern of the antennule and the swimming leg 3 from other genera of the family Rhynchomolgidae. The name is an adjective in the nominative singular. The gender is masculine.

Material examined

Holotype

MALAYSIA • ♂ adult; Sabah, Sipadan Island, Turtle Tomb; 4°07'04.8" N, 118°37'41.0" E; depth 22.0 m; SCUBA diving, light trap; 3 Aug. 2023; B.A.R. Azman leg.; UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644.

Description

Male

BODY (Fig. 2A). Moderately narrow. Total body length, measured from anterior margin of cephalothorax to posterior margin of caudal rami excluding setae, 1.41 mm. Prosome about 0.63 times as long as total body length, comprising cephalosome and four pedigerous somites. First pedigerous somite fused to

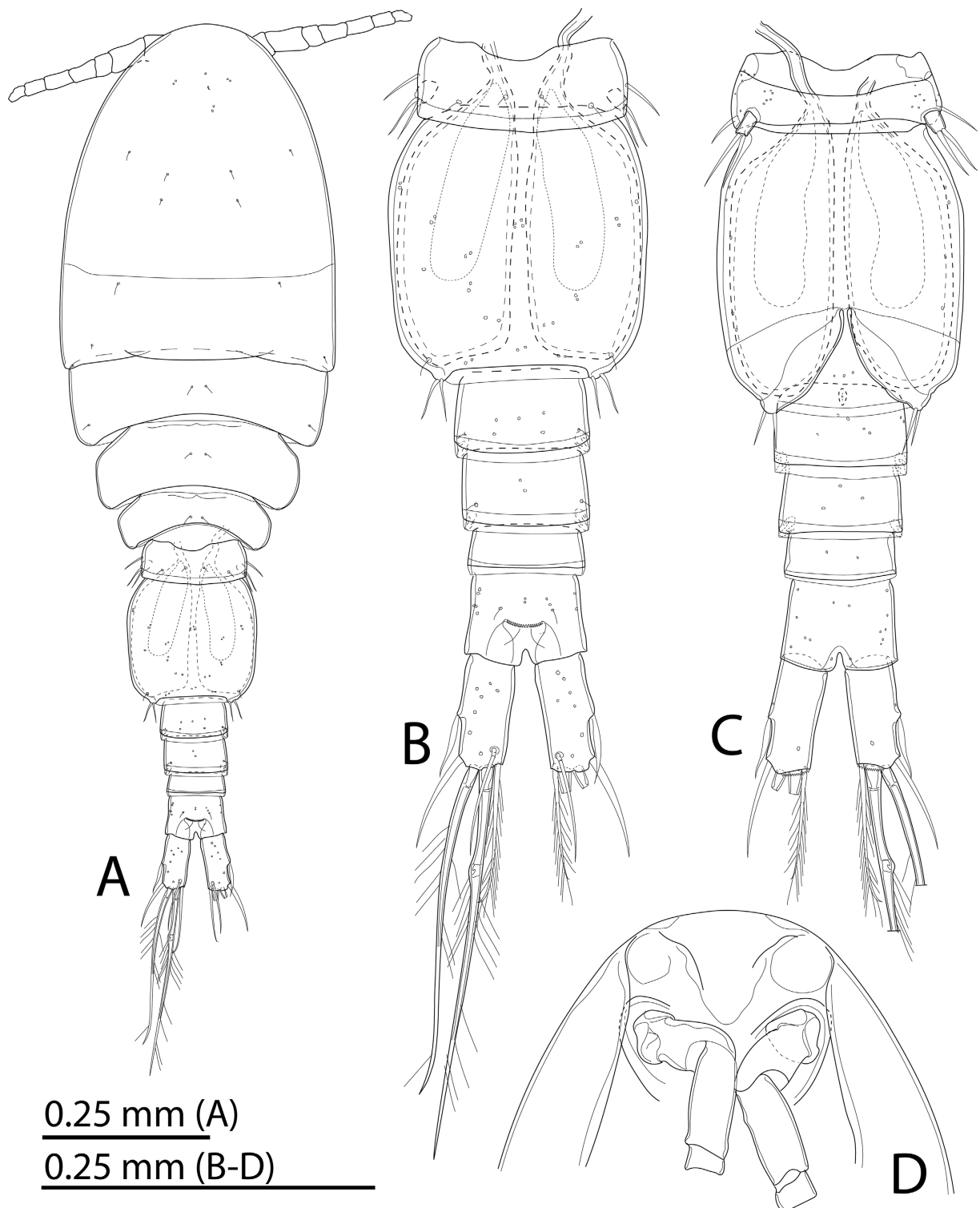


Fig. 2. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov., ♂, holotype (UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644). **A.** Habitus. **B.** Urosome, dorsal view. **C.** Urosome, ventral view. **D.** Ventral view of anterior region of cephalothorax with rostrum and a part of the antenna.

cephalosome, forming cephalothorax. Cephalothorax about $1.29 \times$ as long as wide and about half as long as prosome, with weak dorsal suture representing remnant of ancestral articulation of cephalosome and first pedigerous somite; distal margin smooth; integument with numerous pores and sensillae. Second to fourth pedigerous somites with smooth free margin; second pedigerous somites with pair of sensillae mid-dorsally and sensilla near posterior margin laterally; third and fourth pedigerous somites each with pair of sensillae mid-dorsally.

UROSOME (Fig. 2B–C). Six-segmented, comprising fifth pedigerous somite, genital somite, three free abdominal somites, and anal somite. Fifth pedigerous somite about twice as wide as long, with four sensillae dorsally and group of cuticular pores anterior to free segment of leg 5. Genital somite quadrate, as long as wide, with rounded corners; ornamentation with numerous cuticular pores dorsally and ventrally; posterior margin with smooth hyaline frill. First to third abdominal somites with smooth hyaline frill; first and second abdominal somites slightly wider than long, subequal in length, with cuticular pores dorsally and ventrally as shown (Fig. 2B–C); third abdominal somite wider than long, with pair of cuticular pores ventrally. Anal somite with numerous cuticular pores dorsally and ventrally; two dorsal sensillae near base of anal operculum (Fig. 2B). Anal operculum slightly developed; free margin smooth, with row of spinules anterior to free margin (Fig. 2B).

CAUDAL RAMI (Fig. 2B–C). Rectangular, about twice as long as wide, with six setae; seta II inserted at middle of ramus, naked, widest at middle and tapering distally; seta III naked, shorter than seta VI; seta IV and V plumose, with breaking plane; seta VI plumose and slim, extending to proximal third of seta V; seta VII biarticulate, inserted near inner distal corner.

ROSTRUM (Fig. 2D). Fused to cephalosome, V-shaped, with rounded distal margin and broad base.

ANTENNULE (Figs 3A, 4A–C). Seven-segmented; segment 3 with remnant of ancestral articulation near proximal margin; armature formula 4, 13 + 2 aesthetascs, 4, 4 + 1 aesthetasc, 4 + 1 aesthetasc, 2 + 1 aesthetasc, 7 + 1 aesthetasc; all setae naked; aesthetascs on segments 2, 4, and 5 large and broad; aesthetascs on segments 6 and 7 slender, subequal in length.

ANTENNA (Fig. 3B–C). Four-segmented, with armature formula 1, 1, 3, and 4 + 2 claws; third endopodal segment about twice as long as wide; two terminal claws subequal in size.

LABRUM (Fig. 3D). Wider than long, bilobate, with deep medial incision; distal margin of each lobe with small prominence; ornamentation with outer basal sensilla.

MANDIBLE (Figs 4D, 5A). With mandible blade differentiated into elongate distal lash bearing fine marginal spinules; convex margin forming right angle with distal lash, with two minute, obtuse outer hyaline scales; inner margin differentiated into conical projection ornamented with oblique row of long spinules on inner margin; proximal notch well-defined.

MAXILLULE (Fig. 5B). Represented by small lobe, with one apical, one subapical, and one minute inner seta.

MAXILLA (Fig. 5C). Two-segmented, comprising large, unarmed syncoxa and basis; basis drawn out into tapering lash with outer row of graduated spinules, bearing three elements. Seta I straight and naked; seta II relatively long, reaching distal $\frac{2}{3}$ of tapering lash, with outer row of graduated spinules; seta III minute.

MAXILLIPED (Fig. 5D). Large, four-segmented and subchelate, comprising syncoxa, basis, and distal subchela comprising free proximal endopodal segment and large terminal claw; endopodal segment

unarmed; terminal claw large, with one minute seta proximally and hyaline frill along inner margin; setal formula 0, 2, 0, 1 + 1 claw.

SWIMMING LEGS 1–4 (Fig. 6A–F). Biramous, with three-segmented rami, except two-segmented endopod of leg 4. Intercoxal sclerites present, subquadrate. Coxa with cuticular pore on anterior surface near inner margin. Basis with cuticular pore on anterior surface near distal margin of coxa and group of setulae on medial margin. All rami with cuticular pore on anterior surface of all segments. Armature formula of legs 1–4 as in Table 1.

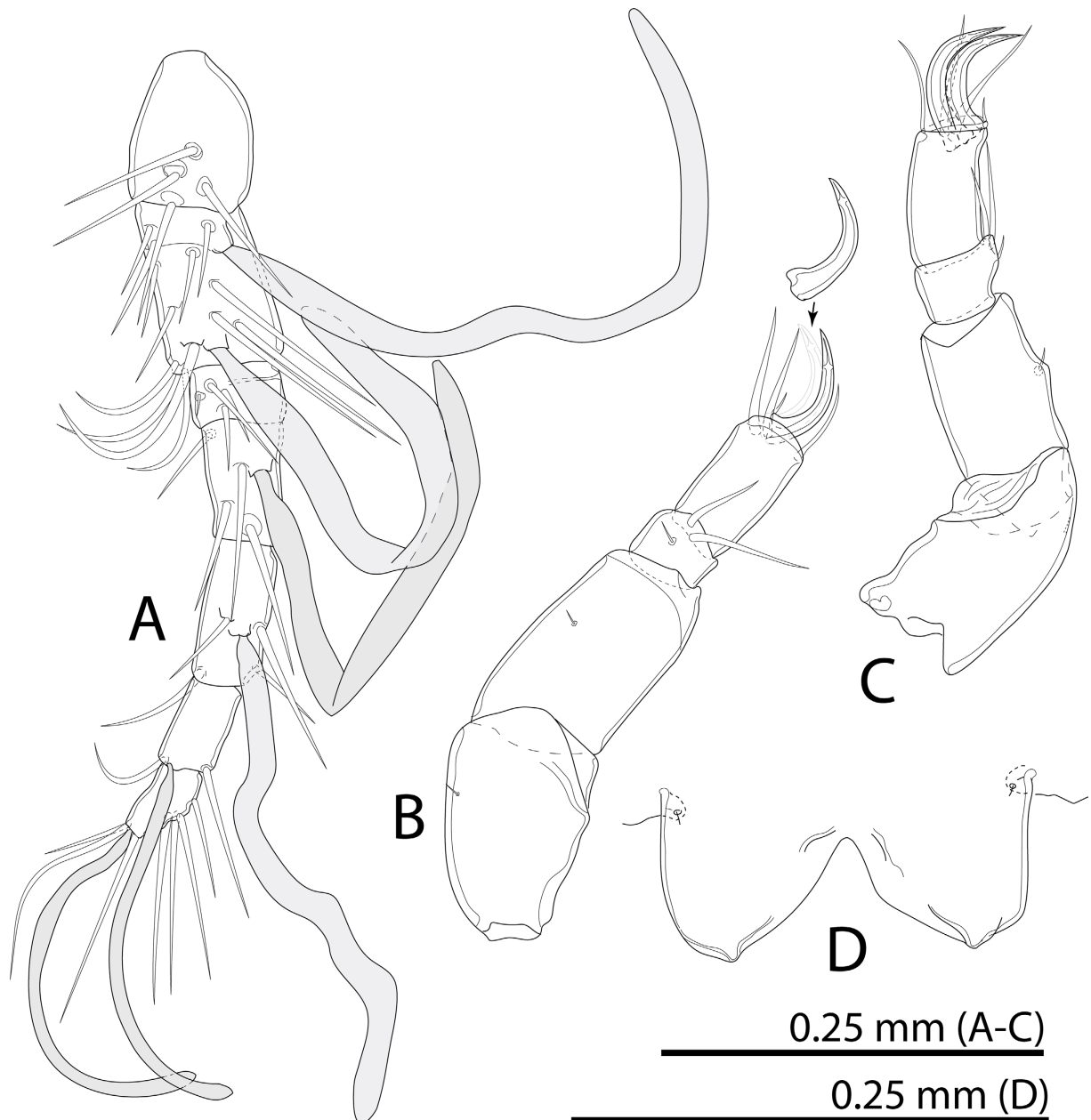


Fig. 3. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov., ♂, holotype (UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644). A. Antennule. B. Right antenna. C. Left antenna. D. Labrum.

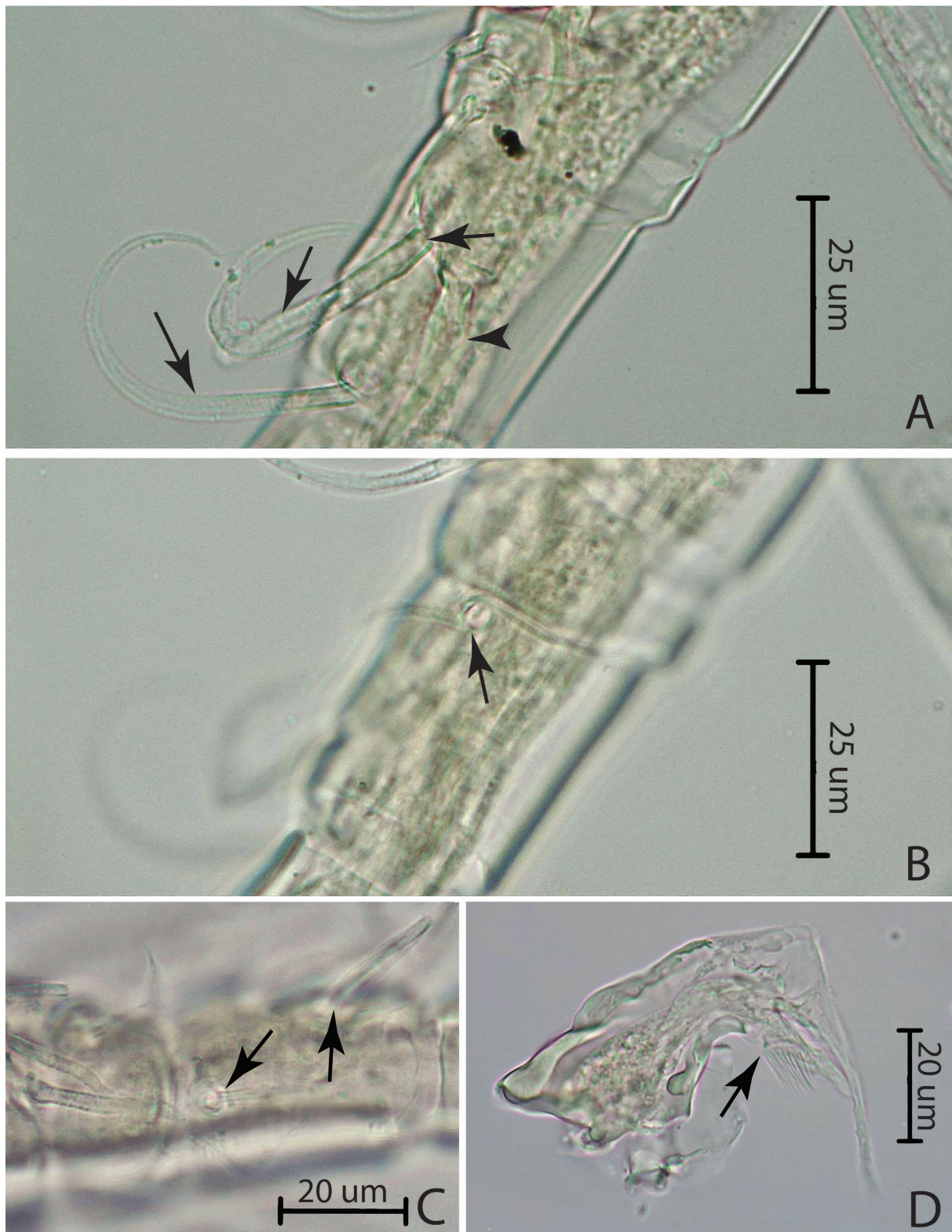


Fig. 4. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov. ♂, holotype (UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644). **A.** Left antennule focused on the anterior surface, with arrows pointed to the setae on segment 4 and the arrowhead pointed to the aesthetasc. **B.** Left antennule focused on the posterior surface, with arrows pointed to the seta insert on segment 4. **C.** Segments 3 and 4 of the right antennule, with arrows pointed to the area where setae insert on segment 4. **D.** Mandible, with arrow pointed to the inner projection.

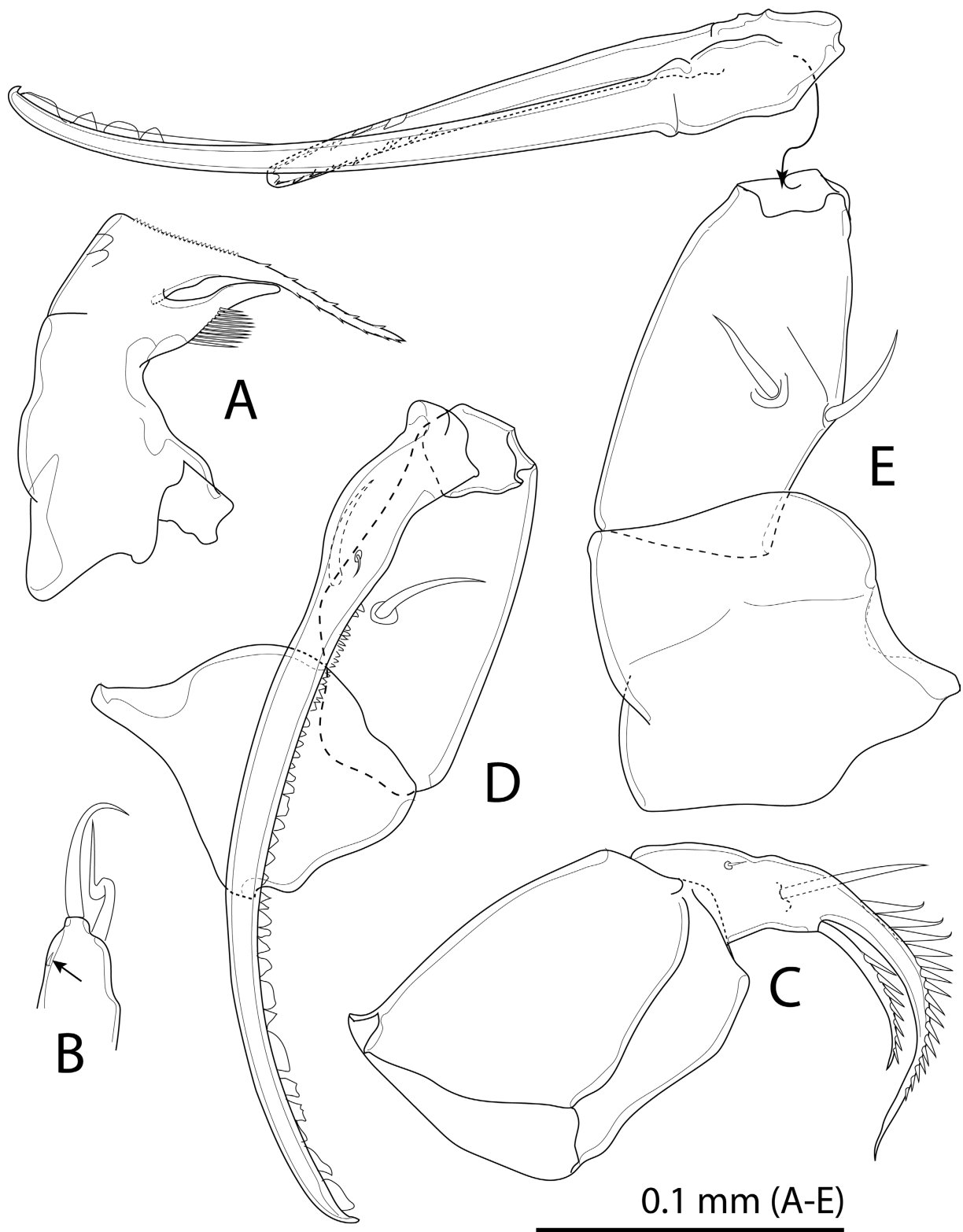


Fig. 5. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov. ♂, holotype (UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644). **A.** Mandible. **B.** Maxillule with arrow indicating the minute seta. **C.** Maxilla. **D.** Left maxilliped. **E.** Right maxilliped.

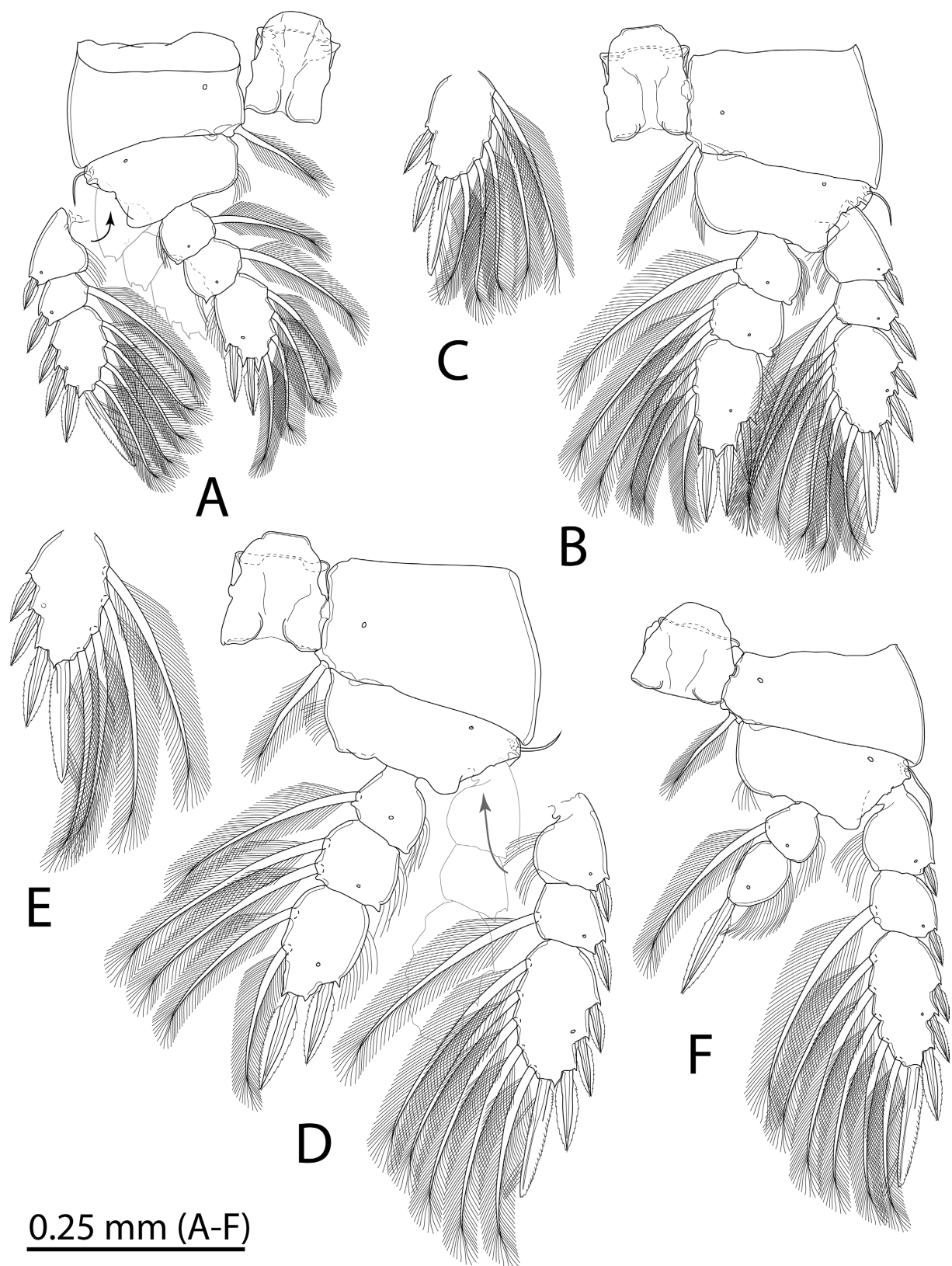


Fig. 6. *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov. ♂, holotype (UKMMZ, UKMMZ-1644). **A.** Leg 1. **B.** Leg 2. **C.** Third exopodal segment of right leg 2. **D.** Leg 3. **E.** Third exopodal segment of right leg 3. **F.** Leg 4.

Table 1. Armature formula of swimming legs P1–P4 of male *Sipadanomolgus dissimilis* gen. et sp. nov. (outer-inner seta/spine; outer-apical-inner seta/spine; Arabic numerals represent the number of setae, and Roman numerals represent the number of spines).

Swimming leg	Coxa	Basis	Exp			Enp		
			1	2	3	1	2	3
P1	0-1	1-0	I-0	I-1	III-I-4	0-1	0-1	I-I-4
P2	0-1	1-0	I-0	I-1	III-I-5	0-1	0-2	II-I-3
P3	0-1	1-0	I-0	I-1	III-I-5	0-1	0-2	I-I-2
P4	0-1	1-0	I-0	I-1	III-I-5	0-1	0-I-0	

SWIMMING LEG 5 (Fig. 2C). Unornamented, with protopodal segment completely fused to somite represented by seta inserted on lateral margin of somite; exopod one-segmented, rectangular, with two subequal, terminal setae.

SWIMMING LEG 6 (Fig. 2C). Represented by cuticular plate with two setae on genital operculum.

Female

Unknown.

Abnormality

The third exopodal segment has only three spines on the right swimming leg 2 and four setae on the right swimming leg 3 (Fig. 6B, E). Furthermore, the right maxilliped has two terminal claws, of which the additional claw is inserted below the normal one and is shorter (Fig. 5E).

Discussion

The new species possesses the general features of the lichomolgoid complex including: i) a cephalothorax with a transverse suture marking the plane of fusion between the first pedigerous somite and the cephalosome, ii) a seven-segmented antennule without geniculation, bearing two aesthetascs on segment 2 and one aesthetasc each on segments 4–7, iii) a mandibular gnathobase transformed into a mandible blade separated from the base of the limb by a proximal notch, iv) a unilobate maxillule, v) a maxilla with the basis drawn out into a long, tapering lash, and vi) a subchelate male maxilliped with the second endopodal segment drawn out into a long claw (Humes & Stock 1972, 1973; Humes & Boxshall 1996). However, the new species cannot be included in any existing family, based on the combination of the following diagnostic features: i) the inner margin is modified into a conical projection free from the main lash, rather than forming an incorporated plate with its distal margin oriented perpendicular to the lash; ii) the antennule bears four setae on segment 4, instead of three (Fig. 4A–C); and iii) the third endopodal segment of leg 3 is reduced from two terminal spines to a single terminal spine. This warrants the establishment of a new genus. Although this combination distinguishes the new species from any known family, the absence of female morphology leaves its phylogenetic position unresolved. We thus provisionally assign it to an existing family within the complex.

According to Humes & Boxshall (1996), three clades within the lichomolgoid families are recognized, among which the following four families are clustered together: Rhynchomolgidae, Anchimolgidae, Kelleriidae, and Macrochironidae. Except for the sexual dimorphism of the distal aesthetasc of segment 2 of the antennule, which could not be examined, the new species displays all other morphological characteristics of that group. The most important diagnostic feature is the mandible, whose blade bears a distal lash (Figs 4D, 5A). This character clearly differentiates the new species from families outside

the clade, where the mandible is typically represented by a short, tapering blade (e.g., Pseudanthessiidae and Sabelliphilidae) or with a reduced/absent inner margin (e.g., Lichomolgidae, Thamnomolgidae, Urocopiidae, and Sapphirinidae) (Humes & Boxshall 1996; Boxshall & Halsey 2004). Other shared features, such as three setae on the second endopodal segment of the antenna (Fig. 3B–C), two spines on the third endopodal segment of leg 1, and two setae on the third endopodal segment of leg 3, further support its placement within the clade.

Morphological examination suggests that among the existing families of the lichomolgoid complex, the new species is best placed within the family Rhynchomolgidae. The most decisive evidence is provided by the mandible and antenna: in the new species, the inner margin of the mandible is ornamented with long, slim spinules, the outer scales are fused basally to the limb, and the antenna bears two strong geniculate claws on the third endopodal segment. This condition contrasts with the Kelleriidae, which possess strong spinules on the inner margin of the mandible and two setiform claws on the antenna; the Anchimolgidae, whose mandible exhibits a bilobed inner margin and a single large terminal claw on the antenna; and the Macrochironidae, which are typically characterized by two free scales on the concave margin of the mandible blade and either one or two large terminal claws on the antenna. The new species shows a close affinity with *Acanthomolgus longiunguifer* Kim, 2005, in the mandible blade forming an elongate distal lash and a convex margin forming a right angle with the lash (Kim 2005: fig. 1g), which further supports its provisional placement in Rhynchomolgidae. Two genera of Anchimolgidae, *Clamocus* Humes, 1979 and *Paraclamocus* Humes, 1997, exhibit a superficially similar feature of the mandible, but the detailed morphology differs: in these taxa, the inner margin bears a row of ornaments on either the proximal lobe or the rudiment of the distal one (see Humes 1979b: fig. 11; 1997: fig. 1i), whereas the mandible of the new species possesses only a single conical projection without any rudiment, reflecting the ancestral partition of the inner margin (Figs 4D, 5A). Additional supporting features include: i) the antenna with the second endopodal segment bearing only setiform setae and the third exopodal segment of leg 4 bearing three outer spines, in contrast to the Kelleriidae, in which one seta is modified into a geniculated setiform claw and the third exopodal segment of leg 4 bears only two outer spines; and ii) the maxilla bearing a well-developed seta I ornamented with spinules, rather than the reduced seta, either naked or ornamented by a membrane flanged on the outer margin, as seen in Anchimolgidae.

Based on the key to genera in Humes & Boxshall (1996), the new species keys out as a member of an existing genus of the Rhynchomolgidae, *Diallagomolgus* Humes, 1979, based mainly on the construction of the swimming leg 4. The construction of the leg is highly variable among members of the family. In most genera, leg 4 has a two-segmented endopod bearing two terminal spines on the second endopodal segment, but the endopod is reduced to either a knob and unarmed in *Ravahina* Humes & Ho, 1968 or is completely absent in *Temnomolgus* Humes & Ho, 1966 and *Numboa* Humes, 1997. The most primitive condition of the endopod of leg 4 is that of *Paranthessius* Claus, 1889, in which leg 4 bears a three-segmented endopod. Four existing genera are characterized by having leg 4 bearing a two-segmented endopod armed by only one terminal spine on the second endopodal segment: *Diallagomolgus*, *Moluccomolgus* Humes, 1992, *Verutipes* Humes, 1982 and *Monomolgus* Humes & Frost, 1964. The new species can be easily distinguished from the latter two genera in having an inner seta on the first endopodal segment of leg 4 and can be distinguished from *Moluccomolgus* in having three outer spines on the third exopodal segment of leg 4 rather than two (Humes & Boxshall 1996). *Diallagomolgus* has three outer spines on the third exopodal segment of leg 4 and three spines on the third endopodal segment of leg 2 (Humes 1979a), similar to those of the new species. However, they can be easily distinguished from each other based on the armature of either the endopodal segment of leg 3 or the antenna. In the new species, there are two spines on both the third endopodal segment of leg 3 and the third endopodal segment of the antenna, but *Diallagomolgus* has three spines on the third endopodal segment of leg 3 and one terminal claw on the third endopodal segment of the antenna (Humes 1979a).

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Author contribution

Conceptualization: CB, BARA. Data curation: CB, BARA. Formal analysis: CB, KW, BARA. Funding acquisition: BARA. Investigation & Methodology: BARA. Writing—original draft: CB, BARA. Writing—review & editing: CB, KW, BARA.

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