Contribution to the knowledge of the benthic tunicata (Urochordata) from Bellingshausen Sea (Western Antarctica)

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Bellingshausen Sea represents one of the less known areas of the Antarctic waters from the benthic fauna taxa. The Spanish research cruise Bentart-2003 in February-March 2003 has enlarged the knowledge of the benthic tunicata from littoral and bathyal bottoms (0 to 2200m depth), sampled by Agassiz trawl, rocky dredge, box-corner and scuba diving on hard and soft substrata. About 1200 specimens belonging to 40 species have been determined. These fauna participated from the Antarctic region and Subantarctic islands, and some interesting species, as Sorberacea group, have been sampled. The paper contributes to the taxonomic, ecological and biogeographical knowledge of this important group (in number and biomass) in the Western Antarctica.