

NSU National Coral Reef Institute Publishes South Florida Sponge Guide



Monanchora arbuscula, a bushy red sponge found on a shallow reef in Broward County



NSU Oceanographic Center professor, Charles Messing, Ph. D. holds a tube sponge, *Callyspongia vaginalis*.

NSU Oceanographic Center professor and National Coral Reef Institute (NCRI) researcher, Charles Messing, Ph.D., recently launched the [South Florida Sponge Guide](#). The guide was produced by Messing and an international team of experts, with funding from NCRI, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Mote Marine Laboratory's Protect Our Reefs Grant Program.

The website, designed by NCRI researcher Kevin Kohler, is a practical and interactive identification guide to the shallow-water marine sponges of South Florida, from the Indian River Lagoon through the Florida Keys, to Florida Bay and the Dry Tortugas. The guide includes illustrated keys and descriptions of whole organisms, diagnostic components (e.g., microscopic spicules) and habitat and biological data. Sponges in this region are far more abundant and diverse than corals, but are often notoriously difficult to identify. The development team designed the website for a wide range of users, including environmental managers, advanced students, teachers, and professional scientists. It will complement and supplement the recently developed "The Sponge Guide: a picture guide to Caribbean sponges" (Zea, S., Henkel, T.P., and Pawlik, J.R. 2009).

Currently, the South Florida Sponge Guide includes detailed descriptions and images of 51 South Florida sponge species. Additional species will be added as they are discovered and classified.