Early benthic life stages of many crab species are rarely seen due to their small size and cryptic behaviour. Hence, little is generally known about their habitat and ecology (WOLCOTT 1988). This also holds true for the mangrove crab *Ucides cordatus* (Linnaeus, 1763): while larger juveniles and adults are frequently encountered in the mangrove forest, where they inhabit conspicuous burrows excavated in the mud, small juveniles with a carapace width (CW) < 1 cm had hardly ever been found in former population samplings. Therefore, there is a gap in knowledge concerning the early juvenile stage in the life history of this ecologically and economically important mangrove crab species. Follow-up studies are however needed to fully determine the role of conspecific burrows for juvenile habitat choice and survivorship in *U. cordatus*.

**KEY WORDS.** Caranguejo-uçá; juvenile; recruitment; settlement; size-frequency.
of the hosting owner crab or inside the sediment of the plugs of these burrows. Mean diameter of the burrow openings of the hosting owners was 3.6 ± 0.08 cm (Fig. 1, minimum 1.4 cm, maximum 5.7 cm).

All hosting burrows showed fresh tracks of larger crabs, indicating that they were inhabited. In 27 cases, the crab gatherer was successful in capturing the hosting owner crabs from these burrows. A total of 63% of the latter were males and 37% were females. The smallest and largest crabs had a CW of 2.1 cm and 5.7 cm, respectively, and average size was 3.8 ± 0.20 cm (Fig. 2). From the non-hosting burrows (without co-inhabitants, n = 1187) 414 crabs were captured. Their minimum and maximum sizes were 1.1 and 7.0 cm and average CW was 3.6 ± 1.03. Figure 3 compares the size-frequency of burrow owners (n = 441; 27 hosts and 414 non hosts) versus co-inhabiting crabs. While the mode of the former was in the class of 3.5-4.0 cm CW, the co-inhabiting crabs (N = 160) showed a mode in the 0.5-1.0 cm CW size class (Fig. 3). The distribution of the co-inhabitants overlapped with the one of owner crabs in the size classes of 1.0-1.5, 1.5-2.0 and 2.0-2.5 cm CW (Fig. 1).

The cryptic life-style and small size of the co-inhabiting conspecific burrows for juvenile survival. Recent laboratory experiments showed that chemical cues emitted by conspecific crabs, regardless of gender, enhance the survivorship and induce the settlement of U. cordatus megalopae (Diele & Smith 2007, Smith & Diele 2008). As U. cordatus odour concentrations are likely to be higher inside conspecific burrows than outside, settlement may indeed occur more frequently (or exclusively?) inside these burrows and explain our findings in the field. However, our sampling did not include the sediment outside the burrows. Consequently, we cannot rule out the possibility that recruitment also takes place elsewhere, irrespective of the presence of conspecific burrows. We will conduct further studies in this context to fully understand habitat choice of the settlers and the significance of co-inhabiting conspecific burrows for juvenile survival.
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