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The long-lived, slow-growing, and low-resilience sea fans *Paramuricea clavata* (Risso, 1826) and *Eunicella cavolini* (Koch, 1887) are keystone species of the Mediterranean coralligenous assemblages and are affected by anthropogenic disturbances and mass mortality events triggered by marine heatwaves (Turicchia et al. 2018; Garrabou et al. 2019). The frequent closeness between colonies of these two sympatric species throughout all the Mediterranean Sea suggests weak interspecific competition, at least at low colony densities, despite a large overlap in their bathymetric distribution (Di Camillo et al. 2018; Ponti et al. 2018). However, a direct interaction between their colonies has never been reported. We photographically documented the accidental contact, maybe caused by basal rocks' movement, between branches of *P. clavata* and *E. cavolini* at 28 m depth at Capo Calvo, Elba Island, Italy (42.7350° N, 10.4342° E, Geodetic Datum WGS84), the May 25th, 2019 (Fig. 1a). The branch portions of *P. clavata* in touch with those of *E. cavolini* showed depigmented coenenchyme and bare skeletons, while the *E. cavolini* ones appeared healthy (Fig. 1a, b).

The interspecific interactions by contact with neighbouring specimens, although well documented for many scleractinians, are still little investigated in gorgonian octocorals. For the purpose, some corals develop specialised (i.e. sweeper and thread-like) tentacles. Around the contact area, there were thread-like tentacles in polyps of *P. clavata*, but not in those of *E. cavolini* (Fig. 1c). In *P.*

clavata, thread-like tentacles, with high densities of nematocysts, have been reported to be involved in feeding activity (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2018). Although these modified tentacles could also have a defensive function, they seem poorly effective weapon against *E. cavolini*, which appeared to be the winner in direct fighting.

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Sampling and field studies: The study is compliant with CBD and Nagoya protocols.

Author Contribution Statement: ET and MP conceived research and conducted field observations. ET wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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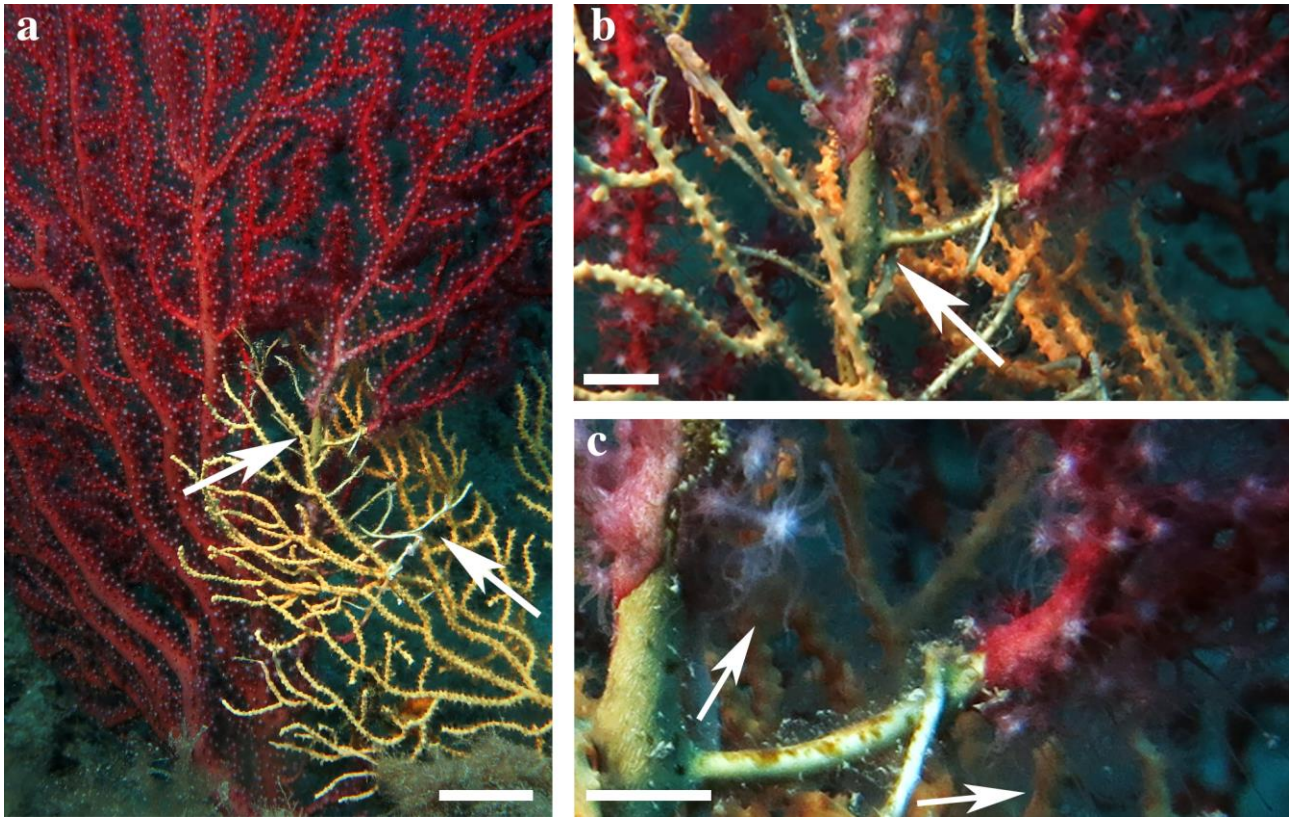

Fig. 1 Colonies of *Paramuricea clavata* and *Eunicella cavolini* in direct contact: **a)** contact points (scale bar 5 cm); **b)** close up of depigmented coenenchyme and bare skeleton of *P. clavata* (scale bar 2 cm); and **c)** particular of thread-like tentacles in polyps of *P. clavata* around the contact area (scale bar 1 cm).