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Did you know...

- > Coral reefs cover less than 1 percent of the Earth's surface, but are home to 25 percent of all marine fish species.
- > Some 4,000 reef fish species and 800 coral species have been documented - but this is just a fraction of the reef species vet to be discovered.
- Coral reefs are called "rainforests of the sea" because of the vast number of species they harbour.
- Coral reefs have been used to produce treatments for cancer, HIV, cardiovascular diseases and human bone grafts.
- More than half of the world's reefs are threatened by human activities. If trends continue, 70 percent of the world's reefs will be destroyed by the year 2050.

2008 Is International Year of the Reel

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), a partnership of two dozen government agencies, NGOs and other institutions, has designated 2008 as the International Year of the Reef 2008 (IYOR 2008).

IYOR 2008 is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of coral reefs and the threats they face, and to motivate people to take action to protect them. The last IYOR took place in 1997.

Throughout the year, governments, individuals, corporations and others around the world will host activities to promote policies to protect coral reefs. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to participate in this initiative.

You can find out more information about IYOR news and events around the world by visiting www.iyor.org.

Top UK Marine Conservation Groups Join Forces to Promote Reef Campaign

Three of the UK's most respected marine conservation groups – Coral Cay Conservation, Blue Ventures and Project AWARE Foundation - have formed a partnership to promote coral reef conservation during the International Year of the Reef 2008.

The groups, which have been designated official country "focal points" with the IYOR, will work with like-minded businesses, government leaders, nonprofits and individuals to raise awareness for the need of reef conservation and push for policies and programmes that will ensure these precious resources remain healthy and productive for future generations.

The last IYOR was designated in 1997, during which hundreds of groundbreaking studies were conducted on coral reefs and numerous international policies were enacted to protect these vital resources.

"Much was accomplished in 1997, but threats to corals have grown exponentially over the past decade," said Pete Raines, founder of Coral Cay Conservation. "Climate change, pollution and destructive fishing practices are killing these vital resources. We must act now before it is too late."

New Programme Recruits Divers to Protect Coral Reefs Against Climate Change

Enlisting the help of volunteer divers and snorkelers around the world, the Project AWARE Foundation has launched CoralWatch to gather information on how climate change is "bleaching" and killing corals.

"Volunteer divers and snorkelers around the world are using their underwater experience to help coral reef conservation," said Suzanne Pleydell, Director of Project AWARE Foundation International. "The data collected by CoralWatch volunteers is critical to help find solutions to protect these incredible habitats."

More than 400 CoralWatch coordinators have signed up so far to collect data and monitor reef health.

Divers and snorkelers who sign up for CoralWatch receive special charts that have a series of colours representing various stages of bleaching. Divers record the type of coral they see and match the coral's colour to the chart. The data is then entered online and used by scientists to answer questions on coral bleaching and recovery patterns, as well as the severity and duration of the bleaching events.

Coral Cay Conservation Founder Discusses IYOR at London's Natural History Museum

Pete Raines, Founder of Coral Cay Conservation, will speak on March 29 at the Natural History Museum's 'Nature Live' event. Raines will discuss upcoming activities for IYOR, the importance of coral reefs in the global environment, the threats they face and how people can protect them. Joining Raines will be Blue Ventures' scientists to help answer questions about coral reef conservation following the lecture.

"Coral reefs are a vital life-support system for hundreds of millions of people. If they vanish at the rates predicted, the economic and social consequences will be catastrophic," Raines said. "But there is hope. If individuals and organizations work together, we can protect these vital resources for the betterment of both people and nature."

'Nature Live' brings together scientists and visitors to explore the natural world through daily events. Visitors and live web audiences can join the experts in topical discussions. For further details of the programme or to watch live and archive events, visit www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-live.



Common sunscreen lotions are causing corals to bleach and die.

Corals in the News

A new study has found that the sunscreen lotion people put on their bodies before going for a swim are killing off corals.

Four ingredients commonly found in sunscreen were found to activate dormant viruses in the symbiotic algae called zooxnthellae that live inside reefbuilding coral species.

The viruses kill off the algae and then spread to infect neighbouring corals. Zooxanthellae provide corals with energy through photosynthesis and contribute to their vibrant colors. When zooxanthellae die, the coral turns white – known as "bleaching" – and usually dies.

Researchers at the Polytechnic University of Marche in Italy estimate that 4,000 to 6,000 metric tons of sunscreen wash off ocean swimmers each year, and that up to 10 percent of coral reefs are threatened by sunscreen-induced bleaching.

The study appeared online in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*.



Come Visit Us at the International Dive Show

Coral Cay Conservation (CCC), Blue Ventures and the Project AWARE Foundation will be at the International Dive Show held at ExCel London March 8-9. During the event, Blue Ventures and CCC will announce a new partnership to reduce carbon emissions that lead to climate change.

CCC has selected Blue Ventures' Carbon Offset (BVCO) as the programme its volunteers will use to offset the emissions produced when they fly to CCC conservation sites around the world. The offset funding from CCC volunteers will allow Blue Ventures to launch a new solar and fuel-efficient stove project in the village of Ampasilava, Madagascar. The project will protect forests and significantly reduce the carbon emissions currently produced by the village's dependence on wood fires for cooking.

Stop by our booth at the dive show and learn how you can visit and protect some of the world's most unique and threatened coral reefs. Learn more at http://www.diveshows.co.uk/events/lids2008/about.shtml.

Dozens of Villages Unite to Launch Largest Community Protected Area in Indian Ocean

More than two dozen fishing villages along the southwest coast of Madagascar are partnering with Blue Ventures to create the largest community-run protected area in the Indian Ocean.

The area will span 800-square kilometers and protect coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds and other threatened habitats. Villages worked with Blue Ventures to identify habitats in need of protection and define the borders of the protected area. Villagers are being trained to implement and manage conservation strategies. The villagers also selected the name of the protected area: Velondriake, meaning "To Live With the Sea."

Along with such conservation strategies as seasonal no-take zones and permanent reserves, Velondriake will implement sustainable development projects – including eco-tourism and sea cucumber farms – that will provide financial alternatives to overexploitation of natural resources.

"Velondriake will not only ensure the protection of coral reefs and other marine resources, but also will benefit local villagers through improved fisheries and sustainable livelihoods," said Alasdair Harris, Science Director for Blue Ventures. "Velondriake shows how conservation and economic development can – and must – go hand in hand."



About Us

Reef News UK is produced by Coral Cay Conservation (CCC), Blue Ventures and the Project AWARE Foundation.

The groups have won recognition from such bodies as the United Nations, the World Conservation Union and governments worldwide for their work to protect coral reefs in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Project AWARE is the dive industry's leading non-profit organization conserving underwater environments through education, advocacy and action. Visit them at www.projectaware.org.

CCC trains volunteers and empowers local people with the practical knowledge needed to monitor and protect the reefs. Visit them at www.coralcay.org.

Blue Ventures is an award-winning not-for-profit dedicated to working with local communities to conserve threatened marine habitats and resources for the betterment of people and nature. Visit them at www.blueventures.org.

