

CORAL CURRENT

The Newsletter of the Coral Reef Alliance

\$25,000 MATCHING GRANT TO EXPAND MAR PROJECTS

An anonymous donor has offered a \$25,000 matching grant to help CORAL expand its voluntary standards project along the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef (MAR). Standards have a long history of improving service quality and safety in many industries. CORAL's goal is to bring these same improvements to marine protected area management. We have until September 15 to raise the matching funds, which would dedicate \$50,000 to the second-largest coral reef system in the world.

In 2007, CORAL and its partners in Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala established the first voluntary standards for sustainable marine recreation in the MAR. To take advantage of the momentum, CORAL is building on the standards project to develop new conservation programs in its Caribbean project sites.

According to CORAL's Caribbean program manager Rich Wilson, "After years of hard work, we're starting to see new alliances between recreational tour operators, marine park managers, and government officials. This is an exciting development, but our ongoing conservation efforts will require a substantial investment of resources to ensure healthy coral reefs in years to come."



"After years of hard work, we're starting to see new alliances."

— Rich Wilson, Caribbean program manager

CORAL's success with the voluntary standards project along the MAR has earned good will for the organization. But cruise tourism is expanding at phenomenal rates, which puts extraordinary pressure on this sensitive reef ecosystem. Unsustainable fishing and poaching continue in the marine parks, and coastal development is still unchecked in some locations. The \$25,000 matching grant will go a long way toward moving CORAL's targeted conservation projects in the region forward in a significant way.

MAR Conservation Projects

BELIZE: In partnership with leaders from the marine tourism sector and the Belize tourism board, CORAL is working with the Belize Ministry of Tourism to transform the voluntary marine recreation standards into marine park regulations. CORAL is also facilitating a national mooring buoy program that will significantly reduce anchor damage to the reef.

COZUMEL: CORAL recently graduated the first class of the CORAL Reef Leadership Network training program (see sidebar above right).

HONDURAS: CORAL just launched a full-fledged program in collaboration with the Roatan Marine Park and local community members on the island of Roatan to continue our efforts to build marine park infrastructure, increase patrols, and strengthen government and community support for this locally managed marine area.



Working Together to Keep Coral Reefs Alive

CORAL is the only international organization working exclusively to save coral reefs. We provide education, tools, and inspiration to help local communities become passionate environmental stewards. Together we develop well-managed marine protected areas and sustainable businesses to benefit coral reefs and people.

CORAL Reef Leaders Graduate

On April 30, 2008, CORAL graduated the first nine members of its CORAL Reef Leadership Network training program in Cozumel, Mexico. The program, which is designed to teach local tour operators how to train others in environmentally sustainable marine recreation practices, was so well received that CORAL has been asked by the federal parks authority, in partnership with the tour operators association, to provide the training to the 1,200 tour guides who operate in Cozumel Reefs National Park. CORAL Leaders will hold their first Sustainable Marine Recreation workshop in late summer, and the first class of CORAL Reef Leaders in Maui will begin training in August.



Stoplight parrotfish (*Sparisoma viride*), Roatan, Honduras
Photo by Julie Bennett

THE CORAL REEF ALLIANCE (CORAL)

351 California St., Suite 650
San Francisco, CA 94104
ph: (415) 834-0900
www.coral.org

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Written and produced by Julie Bennett for the CORAL
External Relations Department
Designed by Damien Scogin (dls4@mac.com)
Proofread by Teresa Castle

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For comments, questions, or contributions to CORAL Current, please email us at communications@coral.org.

Silk Caye, Belize
Photo by Rich Wilson



BREAKING NEWS FROM CORAL'S PROJECT SITES

MESOAMERICAN BARRIER REEF

BELIZE: With the support of CORAL microgrant funding, the mooring buoy project centered in CORAL's project sites in Placencia, Belize City, and San Pedro is growing into a nationwide program.

MEXICO: An alliance between CORAL, the federal parks authority, and the marine tour operators association has been formalized to govern and administer the CORAL Reef Leadership Network and to develop future cooperative conservation initiatives.

HONDURAS: A CORAL microgrant funded the installation of fishing and diving mooring buoys and channel markers within the Roatan Marine Park. With CORAL's support, the marine park association recently earned official status as a non-governmental organization, which will increase the park's visibility within the local community and expand its fundraising opportunities.

INDO-PACIFIC

FIJI: The Namena Marine Reserve will be anchor free upon completion of CORAL's mooring buoy project this summer. A pilot program for sustainable tourism businesses will launch early next year as part of the business plan CORAL developed for the reserve.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: The Madang Lagoon Association launches its CORAL-sponsored marine-tourism Web site—www.madanglagoon.org—in August.

RAJA AMPAT: Misool Island, located west of New Guinea in the Raja Ampat group of islands, has been named CORAL's official CRSD project site in Indonesia.

HAWAII: Nearing completion of the process to establish voluntary standards for marine recreation on the island of Maui, CORAL has launched the process along the Kailua-Kona coast of Hawaii as well.



Restorf Island, Papua New Guinea
Photo by Jeff Yonover

Soft corals, Fiji
Photo by Jeff Yonover

Bonaire sunset
Photo by Bryan Dias



Creole Wrasse (*Clepticus parrae*), Roatan, Honduras
Photo by Julie Bennett



CORAL and Leisure Pro Team Up to Save Coral Reefs



As passionate stewards of the ocean, the recreational dive community has always been an important and enthusiastic conservation partner for CORAL.

If you've had the privilege of swimming through a thriving coral reef environment, you know firsthand how precious these fragile ecosystems are. That's why CORAL is pleased to announce that it has teamed up with Leisure Pro, the Internet's largest dive and snorkel merchant, to build awareness about the many threats imperiling the planet's coral reefs.

In observance of International Year of the Reef 2008, Leisure Pro will draw on its extensive customer base to build increased awareness about coral reef destruction and the many ways CORAL is working to protect coral reefs and the communities that depend on them. Leisure Pro will broadcast and publicize its partnership with CORAL on all of its Web sites and in its various publications, as well as solicit donations from its online shoppers to help CORAL support its conservation programs.

An ardent supporter of CORAL's work, Leisure Pro CEO Phil Mendel observed that "the world is interconnected...business and the environment go hand in hand." CORAL's executive director Brian Huse agrees, noting that "CORAL's unique, mission-driven partnership with Leisure Pro gives us the opportunity to reach active people who care deeply about the environment. CORAL was originally founded by passionate divers, and the dive community continues to be one of our key conservation partners."

To support CORAL's successful Take a Bite out of Fish Feeding campaign, which was designed to eliminate the feeding of reef fish and the sale of fish food, Leisure Pro has agreed to stop selling fish food on its Web site. Originally launched in Hawaii, the campaign has earned support from more than thirty Hawaii-based marine recreation businesses, which have agreed to display a Fish-Friendly Establishment decal and stop the feeding of reef fish. With its new reef-friendly policy, Leisure Pro has become the first business on the U.S. mainland to support the campaign. According to the Leisure Pro team, "Our concern about coral reef damage has led us to a new awareness of the harm caused by feeding coral reef fish. By refusing to sell fish food, we will hopefully not only reduce supply but also raise the consciousness of individuals in regard to the damage wrought."

This unprecedented partnership between CORAL and Leisure Pro marks the beginning of what CORAL hopes will be a continuing trend in mutually beneficial corporate partnerships. Whether you dive, snorkel, swim, or simply enjoy lounging on the beach, Leisure Pro has the equipment you need. And by making Leisure Pro your water sports partner, you help CORAL save reefs around the world.

CORAL's Director of Conservation Programs Is on the Move

With seven international project sites to oversee and a growing demand for his time, CORAL's director of conservation programs, Rick MacPherson, is spending a lot of time in airports this summer. Whether he's raising public awareness, presenting CORAL's work to the scientific community, or attending strategy meetings with conservation partners, Rick speaks passionately about CORAL's mission to save coral reefs wherever he lands.

July 7–11 — 11th International Coral Reef Symposium, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

July 13–17 — Society for Conservation Biology Annual Meeting, Chattanooga, Tennessee

July 21–24 — National Marine Educators Association Conference, Savannah, Georgia

Aug 18–22 — CORAL Reef Leadership Network, Maui, Hawaii

Aug 24–29 — 20th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, Kona, Hawaii

Aug 26 — CORAL Conservation in Action Workshop, Kona, Hawaii

September 11–12 — Steering Committee Meetings, Cozumel, Mexico

September 22–26 — Love Our Planet Week, Bonaire, Netherlands, Antilles

October 21–25 — Diving Equipment and Marketing Association Show, Las Vegas, Nevada

November 17–19 — International Coral Reef MPA Network Meeting, Tokyo, Japan



CORAL Celebrates International Year of the Reef 2008

Taveuni Island, Fiji
Photo by Bryan Dias



The first International Year of the Reef (IYOR) was held in 1997 in response to increasing threats to coral reefs and associated ecosystems like mangroves and sea grasses. Eleven years later, we now know that 25 percent of coral reefs have been damaged or destroyed, and scientists say another 25 percent may die before midcentury; the need to increase awareness and support conservation initiatives is more urgent than ever.

CORAL led collaboration in the first IYOR by hosting online support for event organizers, sponsoring a traveling coral reef photo exhibit, and establishing the first Bonaire Dive Festival. This year, as an official Friend of IYOR 2008, CORAL returned to Bonaire and other events to rekindle the IYOR spirit and reach out to new audiences with the message that coral reefs can be saved.

CAPITOL HILL OCEAN WEEK (CHOW), WASHINGTON, DC, JUNE 3–5

What began as a single day in June 2001 has evolved into the most anticipated ocean policy forum in our nation's capital. Held annually the first week of June, the purpose of CHOW is to provide a neutral forum where a diverse spectrum of ocean science and management stakeholders and policymakers come together to discuss, examine, and exchange information about key issues affecting the health of our oceans and marine resources.

According to CORAL's executive director Brian Huse, "CORAL was honored to be a cosponsor of a CHOW event, but what I find even more gratifying is the attention Congress and the administration are giving to the health of the oceans. I hope that this increased awareness and attention translates into strong ocean policy, sufficient appropriations, and broader interagency cooperation."

BONAIRE'S DIVE INTO SUMMER

Enjoying the recent designation by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as having the "healthiest reefs in the Caribbean," the island of Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles, is celebrating this year's International Year of the Reef with a summer's worth of activities for divers, adventurers, and sunseekers.

During International Year of the Reef Week (June 21–28), CORAL program manager Bryan Dias took center stage in the name of conservation. According to an article in the *New York Daily News*, "a highlight of the program was the Coral Reef Alliance's (CORAL) Program Manager Bryan Dias [who] led specialized dives and conservation-related seminars."

LOVE OUR PLANET WEEK, BONAIRE, SEPTEMBER 20–27

CORAL returns to Bonaire during Love Our Planet Week (September 20–27), when CORAL's director of conservation programs, Rick MacPherson, takes his turn in the spotlight to present interactive seminars about CORAL programs, ongoing coral reef conservation projects, and ways that you can make a difference to coral reefs around the world. Love Our Planet Week falls during Bonaire's annual coral spawning, which typically happens from three to nine days following the full moon in September and October. Don't miss this incredible opportunity to experience the coral lifecycle firsthand.

CORAL's Project Sites Go Digital

This summer CORAL celebrates the launch of three Web sites dedicated to marine conservation in our project sites: The Namena Marine Reserve (www.namena.org) and Waitabu Marine Park (www.waitabu.org) in Fiji, and the Madang Lagoon Association (www.madanglagoon.org) in Papua New Guinea. The sites feature detailed visitor information, local community profiles, and facts about park operations, providing essential resources for tourists, conservationists, members of the local government and communities, and non-governmental organizations.



A unique feature of the Fiji sites is a detailed outline of how revenues generated from the marine park user fees have benefited the local communities. The Namena Marine Reserve's user fees have eliminated destructive commercial fishing, paid for mooring buoy installations to reduce anchor damage, provided annual scholarships for schoolchildren, and extended the protected area to incorporate eleven additional protected areas in a district-wide network. The Waitabu Marine Park's user fees provide funding for biological studies, park maintenance, environmental education projects, and village infrastructure and health.

Because of Madang's unique ecological and cultural attributes, the federal government there has chosen the area to be one of four focus sites for tourism development. The plan earmarks tourism activities for development in Madang, including diving, cultural and nature-based tourism, cruising, and sport fishing. CORAL's involvement with Madang during this critical period of development represents a unique opportunity to foster an atmosphere of conservation, stewardship, and sustainable development.

Each site was designed with extensive participation by local community members as a means of sharing traditional cultural knowledge with potential visitors and engaging the local population in the conservation of its precious natural resources.

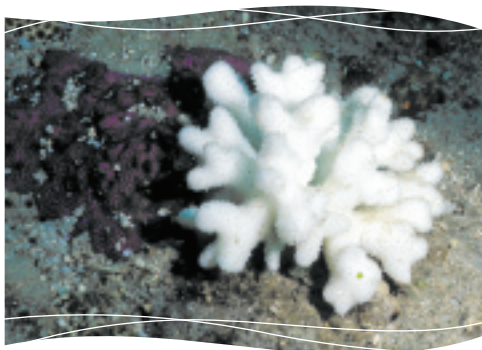
GOVERNMENT REPORT SHOWS CORALS IN DECLINE

According to a newly released report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), almost half of the coral reef ecosystems in United States territory are in poor or fair condition and continue to face intense threats from human impacts such as coastal development, fishing, and recreational use. Although reefs located near populated areas are in more serious danger, even remote reefs located far from human settlements are threatened by overfishing, marine debris, and climate-related impacts such as bleaching, disease, and acidification.

A key factor in reef decline, coral bleaching occurs when sea surface temperatures increase to the point that corals expel their symbiotic algae. If temperatures do not drop quickly enough, the algae are not reabsorbed and the corals die.

Ocean acidification refers to a decrease in pH caused by the absorption of CO₂ by the world's oceans. The resulting increase in acidity has negative consequences for calcifying organisms like corals, whose structures become vulnerable in such conditions.

According to the report's authors, the condition of U.S. coral reefs has been declining for several decades. Since the last report of its kind was released in 2005, two coral species, elkhorn and staghorn corals, have become the first corals ever listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.



Bleached coral

As early indicators of general ocean health, coral reefs represent a significant and valuable environmental habitat:

- Twenty-five percent of all marine species live and grow on coral reefs, including almost half of the fish caught by the commercial fishing industry.
- Healthy coral reefs are natural wave barriers that protect coastal communities from damaging storms and tsunamis.
- Coral reefs are more biologically diverse than rain forests and provide resources for lifesaving medical research for cancer, heart disease, and HIV.
- Coral reef destinations generate a significant portion of worldwide marine tourism income.

This is the first detailed NOAA study to provide conclusive scientific data that coral reefs are in trouble. In a July 7, 2008, article from the Associated Press, NOAA's deputy assistant secretary for oceans and atmosphere Timothy Keeney claims "the report adds another layer of scientific certainty that man-made climate change is stressing the nation's oceans and could ultimately have huge economic and social impacts if its effects are not reversed."

The NOAA report was released at the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where more than 2,500 scientists, government officials, and nonprofit leaders gathered at the beginning of July to share information and strategize new ways to protect coral reefs. More than 270 scientists and managers contributed to the report, which documents coral reef conditions in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico,

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southeast Florida, the Florida Keys, the main and northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and elsewhere.

CORAL's long-term approach to reef conservation responds to reef threats by building the capacity of local communities to protect and manage their coral reefs. The programs raise awareness about the importance of marine protected areas in combating reef decline, build capacity to effectively manage reefs, and foster sustainable tourism and other businesses that reinforce reef conservation with financial independence. By reducing threats on the local level, CORAL gives reefs a chance to build the resilience that will protect them from large-scale threats such as global climate change.

To download a copy of the NOAA report and to view a State of the Reefs map, log on to www.coral.org/news and click on **CORAL News**.

