

# CORAL CURRENT

The Newsletter of the Coral Reef Alliance

## LIBERSON RETIRES FROM CORAL BOARD

After serving seven years on CORAL's board of directors, Dennis H. Liberson retired in April. Originally elected to the board in 2002, Dennis has been a valuable supporter of CORAL's work, providing critical feedback on CORAL's mission, strategies, and personnel decisions.

The former executive vice president of human resources at Capital One Financial Corporation, Dennis retired from the corporate world around the time he got involved with CORAL. In addition to serving on CORAL's board, Dennis has been an active member of the Divers Alert Network (DAN) board since 2004 (he currently serves as chairman of the board) and is leading a comprehensive stream and wetlands restoration project on his property in Virginia.

With help from the Nature Conservancy, Dennis rejuvenated a one-mile stretch of Bolling Branch. The stream, which eventually feeds into the Chesapeake Bay, runs through land that Dennis and his wife, Tracey, bought in Fauquier County three years ago. By placing rocks in strategic areas of the stream, the Libersons created a quintessential babbling brook, which increases oxygen to benefit aquatic life; they are also in the process of building a bridge to help reduce erosion. These efforts will ultimately improve water quality for the people and wildlife of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

By working at the local level to improve his own environment, Dennis is putting into practice the same principles that CORAL applies to reef conservation. "When communities see the benefits of conservation work, you create a conservation ethic among locals that ensures



Photo by Dennis and Tracey Liberson

the work continues," Dennis said. "We need to help communities come up with non-extractive ways to gain income from their reefs. Since I first started working with CORAL, I've watched the organization grow; the overall strategy has evolved and deepened. I appreciate that CORAL has moved beyond making recreation guidelines to helping local people preserve their own reefs. CORAL has taken some big steps forward and has made real progress." Dennis believes that what CORAL is doing is very important for anyone who cares about coral reefs.

According to CORAL Executive Director Brian Huse, "Dennis's unwavering commitment to CORAL, as exemplified through his skills, photography, and generous philanthropy, served not only to advance our vital mission, but also to significantly improve the organization's ability to deliver cutting-edge conservation to the coral reef communities most in need."

A diver since 1985, Dennis has experienced his share of spectacular coral



**Working Together to Keep Coral Reefs Alive**

The Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) unites and empowers communities to save coral reefs. We help the people who live near reefs protect their fragile resources by providing the means to develop local projects that save coral reefs and benefit communities.

reefs, including those at his favorite dive destinations in the Red Sea, the Solomon Islands, and Komodo, Indonesia. Dennis is also a talented underwater photographer, and many of his images have graced CORAL's publications over the years. He is drawn to creating marine life portraits because he gets a sense of a creature's personality when he can look it in the eye. He also likes the challenge of capturing marine life in motion, like big schools of fish and large marine animals.

Sincere thanks to Dennis from everyone at CORAL for his dedication to our mission and for being a valuable part of CORAL's board community for the last seven years. We look forward to continuing our friendship in the years to come.



Neon Triplefin (*Helcogramma striatum*),  
Sangihe Archipelago, Indonesia  
Photo by Dennis Liberson

## THE CORAL REEF ALLIANCE (CORAL)

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"Working Together to Keep Coral Reefs Alive"

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Madang Lagoon, PNG  
Photo by CORAL staff

# BREAKING NEWS FROM CORAL'S PROJECT SITES

## MESOAMERICA

**MEXICO:** CORAL's funding in Mexico through the Summit Foundation has been renewed for fiscal year 2010. Based in Washington, D.C., the Summit Foundation seeks to promote the health and well-being of the planet by achieving a sustainable global population and protecting the earth's biodiversity. CORAL is honored to be funded by Summit through the Mesoamerican Reef Tourism Initiative, a multi-institutional effort to significantly reduce the tourism industry's environmental footprint and maximize its contributions to the protection of the Mesoamerican Reef.

**BELIZE:** CORAL is exploring a new partnership with WWF in Belize and Honduras to collaborate on new alternative livelihood and mangrove restoration projects. On Ambergris Caye, CORAL is supporting Ambergris Caye Citizens for Sustainable Development (ACCSO), an organization formed recently to promote responsible development and local conservation. ACCSO is currently working to stop a South Beach mega development that proposes to alter more than 500 acres of healthy and productive mangrove wetlands.

**HONDURAS:** CORAL program manager Bryan Dias recently returned from Roatan, where he launched a process with the Roatan Marine Park Association to develop a business plan for the MPA. In addition to facilitating strategic planning by the park staff and board, Bryan began surveying local businesses about current MPA effectiveness. U.C. Berkeley Haas School of Business student Ian Hepworth began a ten-week fellowship sponsored by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation at the end of June to assist CORAL with Roatan's business plan process.

## INDO-PACIFIC

**FIJI:** CORAL has hired its third field representative in Fiji. Moala Tokata'a, a native Fijian based in Suva, will be coordinating communication between CORAL and the local community and acting as a liaison with the Kubulau Hierarchy Council. In addition, the three near-shore moorings that make up part of the Namena Marine Reserve's anchor-free zone have been installed.

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG):** Nearly twenty-five mooring buoys will be installed near dive sites to reduce anchor damage from marine recreation in Madang Lagoon. CORAL Field Representative Jennifer Baing will coordinate a group of local dive operators to supervise installation of the moorings, and this same group will facilitate maintenance and monitoring in the future.

**RAJA AMPAT:** Thanks to our close partnership with Misool Eco Resort, CORAL is funding staff time for the resort's rangers, who guard the MPA against poachers and perform community outreach. With generous support from Reef Check Indonesia, CORAL Field Representative Naneng Setiasih will be hosting Misool ranger and new part-time CORAL field rep, Abdul Razak Tamher, in Bali for two months of training in English, computers, and marine conservation.

**HAWAII:** The comment period for the Kona voluntary standards has closed and the balloting process has begun. Hawaii EcoTube, a CORAL-sponsored website and blog that invites people to post evidence of positive and negative impacts of human activities on natural resources, is sponsoring an ongoing contest for a local EcoHero of the Month. To nominate someone or to vote, log on to: <http://hawaiiecotube.blogspot.com>.

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For comments, questions, or contributions to **CORAL Current**, please email us at [communications@coral.org](mailto:communications@coral.org).



# Coral Reefs Hold a Treasury of Undiscovered Species



Home to colorful reefs like this one in Komodo, Indonesia, the area known as the Coral Triangle contains more than 600 species of coral and more than 3,000 species of fish.  
Photo by Jeff Yonover

Often referred to as “the rain forests of the sea,” coral reefs are known to harbor a stunning amount of biodiversity. But just how much is a lot? This question turns out to be quite difficult to answer.

According to current reference publications, approximately 100,000 coral reef species have been identified to date. An impressive number on its own, this count reflects only the species that scientists have already described—and much remains to be discovered. Due to the practical difficulties of studying marine life, the ocean is poorly understood compared to terrestrial ecosystems. Though the ocean covers two thirds of the planet, less than 15 percent of

the world’s identified species are marine. So, how many more coral reef species might be out there?

Trying to figure out just how much we don’t know about something is always a tricky proposition. When it comes to making estimates of how many undiscovered species exist, three main methods have been employed. The first method is the simplest: ask an expert. An expert on a particular group of organisms can estimate the total number of unknown species by considering the number of known and unknown specimens he or she has come across over

the course of a career. Unfortunately, these estimates are very subjective, and getting them at all depends on the availability of suitable experts.

Another estimation method considers the history of species discovery within a group of organisms. By plotting the number of new species that have been discovered over time, scientists can look for trends to predict the future rate of discovery. If the plot shows that the number of new discoveries is leveling off, it could show that most of the spe-

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**Story continued, next page**



This nudibranch (*Flabellina exoptata*) feeding on a sponge at Atun Wreck, PNG, is one of more than 3,000 species that have been identified in the subclass *Opisthobranchia*.  
Photo by Jeff Yonover



There are more than 400 species of shark living today, including this tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) from the Bahamas.  
Photo by Dennis Liberson



# New CRLN Leaders in Belize and Fiji

CORAL field representatives held trainings for new cadres of reef leaders, expanding the CORAL Reef Leadership Network (CRLN) in both Belize and Fiji. In Belize, two new leaders have already taught their first Sustainable Marine Recreation workshop in Caye Caulker.

In Fiji, the recent CRLN training in early April represented an exciting first for CORAL when Jennifer Baing, CORAL's field representative in Papua New Guinea, flew in to co-lead the training with Fiji Field Representative Heidi Williams. The participants benefited greatly from hearing stories, experiences, and wisdom from both field representatives, and the meeting provided an invaluable opportunity for Heidi and Jennifer to share knowledge and build a relationship. The two now regularly collaborate about issues they face in their project sites, and, as Heidi describes it, "[meeting in person] has really bridged a gap that email, telephone, and Skype just can't do."

Among the new Fiji leaders are representatives from five dive shops, who will now carry out the training for the rest of their staff and share their knowledge with clients and others. New leaders from Greenforce, an NGO specializing



in global volunteer projects, will train several volunteer groups each year, and also plan to engage the local schools and community of Kubulau. One new leader, a Kubulau community member, will work with Heidi to develop a way of sharing information with the community itself. To reinforce and extend the training for dive shop staff, CORAL has also initiated a series of seminars on marine education.

Fiji's New CORAL Reef Leaders, top row from left: Emosi Baravilala, Namale Resort & Spa; Ezra Lanyon, L'Aventure Cousteau; Deborah Blaik, Greenforce Fiji; Steve Fitzpatrick, Greenforce Fiji; Paula Veileqe, Kubulau community member; Ross Kilbane, Greenforce Fiji; Janine Anning, Korosun Dive; and Belina Ellis, Aggressor II (not pictured); bottom row from left: Heidi Williams (with Kaya) and Jennifer Baing (with Yavita)  
Photo by CORAL staff

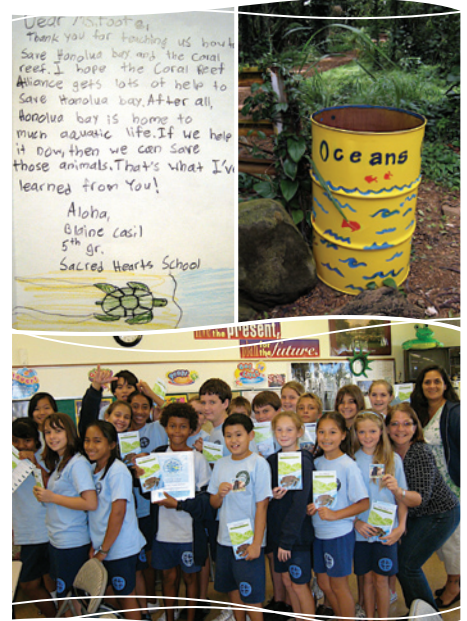
## Honolua Bay Gets a Face-Lift on Earth Day

More than 100 people turned out to celebrate Earth Day at Maui's Honolua Bay on April 25. The only Marine Life Conservation District accessible from shore on Maui, Honolua Bay gets more than 700 visitors per day during the high season.

This day filled with activities designed to celebrate the Earth and protect Honolua's fragile marine resources began with a *pule* (prayer). Participants celebrated the installation of new toilets and garbage cans, and took part in underwater and shoreline clean-ups, water-quality monitoring projects, coral reef surveys, and other activities including a community stewardship charter hosted by Trilogy Excursions.

A CORAL microgrant awarded to the Save Honolua Coalition partially funded the maintenance of two portable toilets. To raise awareness about the threats to Honolua's vital coral reefs, CORAL Hawaii Field Manager, Liz Foote, enlisted the help of students from Lahaina's Sacred Hearts School to make posters depicting responsible reef behavior.

Four of the educational posters were framed and hung inside the portable toilets, while other posters have been exhibited in the Wharf Cinema Center. The students also turned their artistic abilities loose painting cheerful environmental messages on a new garbage can. The students of Sacred Hearts School have demonstrated passionate stewardship for their local reefs thanks to "Project Port-a-Party" 2009.



Clockwise from left: Thank-you card from Sacred Hearts students; New garbage can at Honolua Bay; Students from Sacred Hearts School in Lahaina  
Photos by Liz Foote

# CORAL REEF TREASURY, CONTINUED

cies in that group have been identified. Problematically, though, the lack of new discoveries could just reflect a lack of scientists studying that particular group. Furthermore, if the number of new discoveries is still growing steadily, no one can tell where it will level off.

The third method, using intense area surveys, involves marking out a patch of habitat, collecting absolutely everything in it, counting the species, and extrapolating a total species estimate for the whole habitat region. Although this method seems more objective, it has its own problems. Since it is only practical to include very small areas in these surveys, samples might not be representative of the whole region. Furthermore, there are obvious ethical considerations about obliterating a patch of habitat for research purposes—survey areas can take a long time to recover.

Unsurprisingly, studies using different methods of estimation vary widely in their results. It seems we can pin the total number of coral reef species somewhere between 200,000 and 10 million—that allows a lot of room for error! However, the most commonly cited estimate comes in around 1 million. This figure suggests that only 10 percent of coral reef species have been discovered.

The enormous number of undiscovered coral reef species makes a powerful argument for conservation. The loss of coral reefs would strike a phenomenal blow to the Earth's total biodiversity. It's not just the loss of species that concerns us, though—it is the loss of the potential benefits they provide for us, including medicines, food, storm protection, and tourism. We cannot know what essential ecosystem services, life-saving chemical compounds, or inspirational adaptations exist among the hundreds of thousands of undiscovered reef species. We do know this, though: healthy reef ecosystems, and all of the benefits they provide, are dependent on species richness. It is up to us to protect this precious resource for the future.



## CORAL Donor Spotlight: Murray and Jeanie Kilgour

From their house on the shores of Michigan's Lake Charlevoix, Murray and Jeanie Kilgour have a stunning view of the setting sun as it sinks behind the lake each evening. The Kilgours have always been drawn to the water: Murray grew up in Canada fishing and swimming in the St. Lawrence River and Jeanie, who was raised in landlocked Indianapolis, spent her summers on the lake in Michigan.

In October 1993, the Kilgours got certified to dive in Lake Michigan's dark and cold waters. Jeanie remembers surfacing after her first dive to see snow on the surrounding hills. With autumn water temperatures in the mid 50s to low 60s and visibility that rates murky at best, Great Lakes scuba diving is what Murray calls "diving by brail—because unless you touch it, you can't see it." As a result, Murray has taken to ice diving during the winter, when the chilly 34-degree water is crystal clear.

When the Kilgours, who are both retired, started diving seriously in 1995–96 (and by "seriously," they mean 100 dives per year!), they also started researching organizations working to protect coral reefs. That's how they discovered CORAL and began supporting its work. They've continued to donate to CORAL's programs because of its grassroots approach to conservation. According to Murray, "Jeanie and I are gravitating to hands-on organizations because we feel our money is better spent there. This type of nonprofit provides something tangible that we can point to and say 'I helped pay for that!' As a donor, I feel like I'm accomplishing something concrete when I support an organization like CORAL."

Jeanie agrees by pointing out that donations to CORAL "give us the opportunity to protect our favorite places, many of which are outside of the United States. This is our payback to those areas that give us so much happiness." With its sheer walls covered in soft corals, Fiji is the place Murray and Jeanie both prefer to dive. "You can't go to Fiji without diving at Namena," Murray states enthusiastically.

With more than 2,500 dives and nearly 20 years of marriage between them, the Kilgours spend most of their holidays in spectacular underwater destinations like Palau, North Sulawesi, Cuba, Cayman Islands, Hawaii, Galapagos, Belize, Honduras, Turks & Caicos, Yap, and Tahiti. Their latest passion is discovery diving—which means diving new sites where people don't normally go. These rarely visited areas often reveal healthy and thriving coral reefs. And it is these pristine ecosystems that inspire this adventurous couple to support CORAL.

As a ten-year veteran dive instructor, Murray is a strong advocate for both diving and environmental responsibility. Jeanie says "he's an excellent teacher; everyone who takes his class raves about Murray. He would be first in line for gill transplants; it's gone well beyond passion to obsession," she laughs. "There's no polite way to say this," admits Murray, "but either we start being concerned about the environment—and do something to change it—or we all die. Grassroots change is imperative. What we do for the reefs, we do for ourselves." Well said, Murray.





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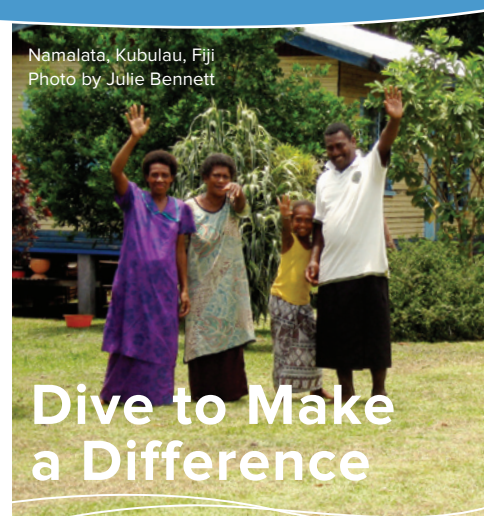
# Join CORAL's Community on Facebook!



**CORAL joined** the new media revolution in May with the launch of its fan page on Facebook. In less than one month, more than 2,000 people became fans of our page and more than 600 people became members of CORAL's "Join Our Coral Reef Revolution" cause. So far we've raised \$1,326 for coral reef conservation, which includes a gift of \$500 given as a challenge grant by board member Mark Rovner.

Featuring photographs from CORAL's project sites, a coral reef news feed that updates daily, information about CORAL events and trips, plus lively debates among our fans and supporters, the CORAL Facebook page is a one-stop shop for coral reef information.

To join our community on Facebook, go to [www.facebook.com/coralreefalliance](http://www.facebook.com/coralreefalliance). Log in to your Facebook account, become a CORAL fan, and join our cause!



Namalata, Kubulau, Fiji  
Photo by Julie Bennett

## Dive to Make a Difference

There are a few spots left on CORAL's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary dive trip to Fiji, November 21–28, 2009. Visit the Namena Marine Reserve's spectacular and protected coral reefs, as well as the vil-lagers who depend on them for survival, in the Kubulau District, CORAL's oldest project site. Learn more at [www.coral.org/dive\\_trip](http://www.coral.org/dive_trip).