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Commentary

# The Role of Corals in Shaping the Seafloor and Maintaining Biodiversity

**Joey Smith***

*Department of Oceanography, University of Athens, Athens, Greece*

## DESCRIPTION

Corals are fascinating animals that form reefs, which are among the most complex and diverse ecosystems in the ocean. Corals play a vital role in shaping the seafloor and maintaining biodiversity by providing habitat, food, and protection for a variety of marine life.

Corals are colonial organisms, meaning that many individual creatures called polyps live and grow while connected to each other. The polyps use ions in seawater to make limestone exoskeletons for themselves, which form the structure of the reef. Coral polyp bodies are usually clear, but they appear colorful because of various types of algae that live in their tissue. The algae remove waste from the coral and use it for photosynthesis, which produces oxygen and carbohydrates that the coral consumes. This symbiotic relationship helps the coral grow and build reefs.

Coral reefs are sometimes called the "rainforests of the sea" because they have the highest biodiversity of any ecosystem on the planet. Although they cover only 0.2% of the ocean's surface, coral reefs are home to 30% of marine biodiversity. For fish and other marine animals, corals are real shelters against predators, but also a reproduction and nursery area for many species. They are the essential foundation of marine life in the tropic.

Coral reefs host a wide range of symbiotic relationships among different species. For example, "cleaner" fish and shrimp keep other fish healthy by freeing them of parasites, while crabs and sea cucumbers scavenge and clean up detritus on the reef and ocean floor. Sea anemones have formed mutually beneficial relationships with fish and crabs, such as clownfish and anemone crabs.

In coral reef ecology, each species serves a certain purpose. Some corals are protected from their potentially fatal rivals by herbivorous predators that specialize in consuming various types of algae. The populations of smaller fish and other organisms are maintained in balance by others, such as sharks, groupers, and other predatory fish. The reef itself is consumed by parrotfish. In order to reach the tiny algae dwelling inside the coral polyps, they scrape the coral. After that, they grind up the coral skeleton with their throat-mounted teeth and expel it as sand.

In addition to offering a diverse environment for marine life, coral reefs also benefit humans. Fish harvested on coral reefs and in its vicinity provide food and money for millions of people worldwide. In addition, the reefs attract tourists, which benefit the regional businesses. Along with providing a barrier that lessens the impact of high waves on shore, coral reefs shield people and land from storms.

Coral reefs are also valuable sources of new medicines for humans. Corals produce diverse chemical compounds that are being explored for treating diseases such as cancer, arthritis, bacterial infections, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, viruses, and other disorders.

However, coral reefs are facing many threats from human activities and climate change. Overfishing, pollution, coastal development, invasive species, coral bleaching, ocean acidification, and diseases are some of the factors that endanger coral reefs and their biodiversity. Coral bleaching occurs when corals expel their algae due to stress from high water temperatures or other causes. Without their algae, corals lose their color and their main source of food.

Coral reefs are important for both marine life and human well-being. They play a key role in shaping the seafloor and maintaining biodiversity by providing habitat, food, and protection for a variety of species. They also benefit people by providing food security, economic opportunities, coastal protection, and potential medicines. Therefore, it is essential to conserve and restore coral reefs for their ecological and social value.

**Correspondence to:** Joey Smith, Department of Oceanography, University of Athens, Athens, Greece, E-mail: joey00@gmail.com

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