



CAN-019-Declining Reefs-Caribbean

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

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Caribbean Reefs Declining at an Alarming Rate: Report

By Staff Reporter

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coral reef (Photo : REUTERS/Christa Cameron)





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Most Caribbean reefs will disappear in the next two decades, a new report states.

Researchers said that around 50 percent of the Caribbean coral reef has declined in the past fifty years. Around 90 experts, over the course of three years, have worked on the report, [Status and Trends of Caribbean Coral Reefs: 1970-2012](#).

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Around nine percent of the world's corals live in the Caribbean. These ecologically diverse reefs are a crucial part of the Caribbean economy. Tourism and fisheries in the Caribbean reefs account for as much as U.S. \$3 billion annually.

Caribbean coral reefs have just one-sixth of the original coral cover left. Climate change, oceanic acidification and loss of marine grazers have led to a rapid decline in the number of corals in the region.

There is hope though. Experts have said that restoring population of two key species in the coral reefs - the parrotfish and sea urchins - could slow down the rate of loss of corals. Additionally, better coral management techniques and protecting the corals from pollution could help save one of the world's largest biologically diverse areas.

"The rate at which the Caribbean corals have been declining is truly alarming," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, Director of IUCN's Global Marine and Polar Programme, according to [a news release](#). "But this study brings some very encouraging news: the fate of Caribbean corals is not beyond our control and there are some very concrete steps that we can take to help them recover."

A disease that hit sea urchins in 1983 led to a rapid decline in the grazer population. Overfishing in the region has nearly wiped out parrotfish species in the region. Researchers said that the loss of these two key species has helped algae kill corals.

Protecting the grazers could help restore the Caribbean coral reef to some extent, report authors said.

"Even if we could somehow make climate change disappear tomorrow, these reefs would continue their decline," said Jeremy Jackson, lead author of the report and IUCN's senior advisor on coral reefs. "We must immediately address the grazing problem for the reefs to stand any chance of surviving future climate shifts."



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Coral reefs in some regions such as Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in the northern Gulf of Mexico, Bermuda and Bonaire, have healthy population of corals. These areas have banned or have at least restricted use of fishing techniques that harm parrotfish populations.

Previous research has shown that [saving coral reefs could be a cheap and easy way](#) of saving coastlines around the world.

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*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....**Edmund Burke***