

BOOK REVIEW



Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2008. Edited by Clive Wilkinson. Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, Townsville, Australia, vi + 296 pages (www.gcrmn.org). ISSN 1447-6185. (Accompanying CD with much more extended material)

This is a compact soft-cover volume (18 × 25 cm) with a colourful front and back cover. The front cover depicts three young boys in a village market posing with a large specimen of Napoleon Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), a marine coral reef fish listed as endangered on Appendix II of CITES. The back cover depicts a healthy coral reef scene, but includes in the top left corner a submerged polar bear. The polar bear had been added in to illustrate the deleterious impacts of global warming (more details on page 13). Both covers are also displayed with the logos of 20 agencies directly supporting this joint publication effort.

This current volume is the fifth global report since the inception of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) in 1996; and it was recently launched in February (2009) in Singapore. All the previous reports (in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004) had aimed to present the current status of the world's coral reefs, the threats to the reefs, and the initiatives undertaken to arrest the reef decline. The current report does the same and had called upon the voluntary contributions of 372 experts from 96 countries (which is a vast increment of contributions from previous reports).

The report covers 95 countries, states and territories; which had been divided into the various 20 chapters (each chapter

covering a region with multi-authorship). It basically covers the country reports on the current state of their coral reefs. It had been a monumental effort for such a publication to come into fruition.

From this report, the world has effectively lost 19% of the original area of coral reefs; with a further 15% of projected loss in the next 10–20 years. However, 46% of the world's reefs are regarded as healthy and not under immediate threat of destruction. These projected figures are not without caveats, as explained in the text.

From the various regional reports, the Southeast Asia region is here highlighted as it contains the largest area of coral reefs (34% of the world's total) and is within the scope of the Raffles Bulletin of Zoology.

Amongst the noteworthy is that the conditions of coral reefs had improved in Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore, but declined in Indonesia and Malaysia. Timor-Leste is included for the first time as the tenth Southeast Asian country. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami caused localized coral reef damage in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. The region's fish stock had been overfished, and more than 50% of the region's mangroves have been lost.

The accompanying CD contains more material in PDF format pertaining to the coral reef status. Additional material on Middle East, Indian Ocean, Asia, Pacific, Caribbean; and including a 13 page list of suggested reading material encompassing numerous web resources.

All in all, it makes both gloomy and heartening reading, and it is good to know that there are many volunteers and agencies out there monitoring and documenting the reefs and making the effort to make a change. A definite must-have for marine biologists and conservationists.

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