



SANGRE GRANDE REGION

TOURISM NEWSLETTER

A Publication of Sangre Grande Regional Corporation



Credit: Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club



Credit: Dr. Stanton Belford

TOCO'S CORAL REEFS

"Toco is the only place where coral reefs in Trinidad exist, and therefore irreplaceable." - Dr. Stanton Belford.

The uniqueness of Toco's reefs that extend from Grande L'Anse to Salybia Bay demonstrate the persistence of reef communities in marginal environmental conditions.

The marine conditions around Toco are turbulent, turbid and flushed by nutrient rich Orinoco waters.

In these extreme conditions, nevertheless, there is evidence of historical reef development and a persistent reef community. To scientists, these marginal environments are mysteries that give insight into survival in sub-optimal or even challenging conditions.

Dr. Stanton Belford, Trinidadian born scientist who has been studying the reefs for almost 30 years describes the reefs as "patchy".

Once into Salybia (*just before the short drive to the Toco Lighthouse*), **the only fringing reef in Trinidad** can be found.

This reef hugs the shoreline and extends approximately 200 metres from the shore before reaching the reef crest.

Many invertebrates show themselves during different times of the year. For instance, Dr. Belford has seen ebbs and flows in population increases of the bearded fireworm (*Hermodice carunculata*), lettuce slug (*Elysia crispata*), rock-boring sea urchin (*Echinometra lucunter*), cannonball

IN THIS ISSUE

Toco's Coral Reefs

jelly (*Stomolophus meleagris*) to name a few. No matter what time of the year he visits, he always sees something different.

Findings from published work that Dr. Belford has done in collaboration with the late Dr. Dawn Phillip from the University of the West Indies found that the coral reefs of Toco consisted of a subset of Caribbean coral species, including finger corals (*Porites porites*) and encrusting corals, such as the starlet coral (*Siderastrea radians*) and fire coral (*Millepora icicornis*) with rare

occurrences of other reef building coral species.

These corals are capable of surviving the exposed environments because they have fast growth and reproductive rates.

Although low in diversity, the corals contribute to a reef capable of providing homes to over 200 marine species, including including crustaceans, sponges, sea urchins, soft coral, algae and fish.

Dr. Belford believes that knowledge of these marginal environments have direct importance to us, the users and beneficiaries of the marine environment. Changes in the marine communities serve as a barometer of significant threats to water quality and other environmental conditions but also allow us to preview environments of the future. These findings will be especially beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago as a small-island developing state dependent on our coral reefs and marine ecosystems as a source of income.

Dr. Farahnaz Solomon, a marine biologist and co-director of the NGO SpeSeas, believes that an understanding of how marine ecosystems contribute to livelihoods can stimulate positive changes in the way we use ocean resources, and effect policy.

She says, “Coral reefs are often only appreciated for their beauty and bountiful biodiversity. Teeming with life, they are regarded as ‘rainforests of the oceans’ as they cover only 0.1% of the seafloor, and yet provide shelter for about 25% of all marine life. What is more important to know, this biodiversity is responsible for productive fisheries and thriving recreation and tourism sectors where reefs occur. Even ‘non-reef’ species may use the reef and associated systems to have their young or for protection during their larval and juvenile stages. Through all these services, reefs contribute significantly to human well-being.”

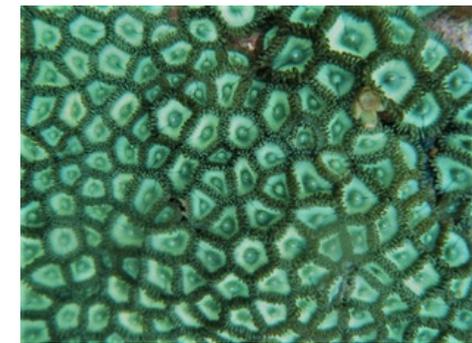
References:

Protect Toco's coral reefs! (wildtobago.blogspot.com)

UWI Today - Speaking for Coral Reefs



Credit: Dr. Anjani Ganase



Credit: Trinidad Guardian



Credit: T&T Field Naturalists' Club

CONTACT US

Have a tourism asset you would like highlighted in an upcoming issue?

 280-4411

 ledsgrc@gmail.com

 Local Economic Development Sangre Grande

 ledsggrande