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The distribution of reef-corals in the Indian Ocean with a historical review of its investigation

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Abstract

The investigation of corals started with Forsk. in the Red Sea in 1775. The knowledge of the corals of the Indian Ocean was acquired and enlarged during many expeditions. In 1954, Wells compiled a table showing the distribution of Indo-Pacific hermatypic coral genera, and presented the data on a map of the Indo-Pacific, including ten locations for the Indian Ocean.

More recent expeditions have continued to enlarge our knowledge and in 1971 Rosen again compiled a similar table, but only for the Indian Ocean. Rosen plotted the numbers of genera found at 57 locations on a map. In the 12 years since Rosen's paper much more information has been published, and so the map has been updated. The plot of numbers of genera at 53 locations shows a belt of high diversity extending from South

Mozambique to the Maldives including Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago. Further centres occur in the Red Sea, including the Gulf of Aqaba, and the area near Phuket Thailand.

A comparison of the corals of the Indian and Pacific Oceans shows that a great number of coral genera is common to both oceans, so there is a uniform Indo-Pacific Reef Region which contrasts with the Atlantic Reef Region. The Indian Ocean has 11 endemic coral genera.

Some of the ecological factors controlling the horizontal distribution of the corals are temperature, salinity, currents and sedimentation. But hostile animals and pollution are of influence. Finally, the time which has been spent investigating reefs and collecting corals can seriously limit our knowledge of the distribution of coral genera, and introduces an element of uncertainty into our interpretations of the data.



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This paper is dedicated to Prof. Dr. Hans Hass, the pioneer of underwater research and leader of the "XARIFA"™ Expeditions, for his 65th birthday.

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