

FOUR NEW CORALS RECORDED FROM INDIAN WATERS

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The coral *Truncatoflabellum crassum* (Milne Edwards and Haime, 1848).

Scientists have recorded four species of corals for the first time from Indian waters. These new species of azooxanthellate corals were found from the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Azooxanthellate corals are a group of corals that do not contain zooxanthellae and derive nourishment not from the sun but from capturing different forms of planktons. These groups of corals are deep-sea representatives with the majority of species being reported from depths between 200 metres and 1,000 metres. Their occurrences are also reported from shallow coastal waters unlike zooxanthellate corals that are restricted to shallow waters.

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientist behind these new findings, Tamal Mondal, said all the four groups of corals are from the same family, Flabellidae.

Truncatoflabellum crassum (Milne Edwards and Haime, 1848), *T. incrustatum* (Cairns, 1989), *T. aculeatum* (Milne Edwards and Haime, 1848), and *T. irregulare* (Semper, 1872) under the family Flabellidae were previously found in Japan, the Philippines and Australian waters, while only *T. crassum* was reported with the range of Indo-West Pacific distribution.

Mr. Mondal said azooxanthellate corals are a group of hard corals and the four new species recorded are not only solitary but have a highly compressed skeletal structure. "Most studies of hard corals in India have been concentrated on reef-building corals while much is not known about non-reef-building corals. These new species enhance our knowledge about non-reef-building solitary corals," he added.

Dhriti Banerjee, director of ZSI, said that coral reefs are one of the most productive, sustainable, and pristine ecosystems of the world's oceans, especially in shallow coastal waters.

"Hard corals are the prime and intrinsic part of the coral reef ecosystem. ZSI has given special emphasis on the exploration of the coastal and marine biodiversity of India in recent times. It has come out with several new discoveries and ecological findings," Ms. Banerjee said.

The currently reported four species of solitary stony corals enhance the national database of biological resources of India and also define the expansion of scope to explore these unexplored and non-reef building corals, she said.

Zoological Survey of India has given special emphasis on the exploration of the coastal and marine biodiversity of India in recent times and come out with several new discoveries and ecological findings with utmost importance

Dhriti Banerjee

Director, Zoological Survey of India

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