



Monospecific coral areas on the northern shore of the Gulf of Aden, Yemen

Domination of coral communities by extensive monospecific areas is a conspicuous feature of reefs in two regions at opposite ends of the Indo-Pacific, namely Panama and other areas in the tropical eastern Pacific (reviewed by Cortés 1997), and Oman in the western Arabian Sea (Glynn 1993). Although overall coral diversity is considerably greater in Oman than the eastern Pacific, in both regions *Porites* and *Pocillopora* dominate extensive areas.

The Gulf of Aden lies between Oman and the Red Sea (see map) and until recently was believed, with the exception of Djibouti in the extreme west, to be devoid of significant corals. Recent surveys have however revealed that extensive and diverse coral communities exist throughout the Gulf (Obura 1997; Kemp 1998; Sheppard *et al* in press). A survey in early 1998 revealed that monospecific areas similar to those of Oman occur throughout the northern Gulf, and extend westwards almost to the entrance of the Red Sea. These monospecific areas frequently co-exist closely with highly diverse coral communities.

The photograph shows part of an extensive area of *Pocillopora damicornis* (approximately 30 m x 20 m x 3.5 m, diver illustrates scale) in 7 metres of water at Bir Ali in the eastern Gulf (14°01'.02N, 48°20'.01E). Several hundred metres of



shoreline in the Bir Ali area were dominated by similar colonies, although most were limited to approximately 2 metres in height by shallow inshore waters. Large monospecific areas of *Pavona cactus*, *Stylophora pistillata* and a foliose *Montipora* sp were also present. Similar areas of *Pocillopora* and *Montipora* were recorded at Ras Imran in the western Gulf (12°47'N, 44°39'E).

Coral communities in the northern Gulf resemble those of Oman in many respects, but differ considerably from those on the south side of the Gulf, which appear to be dominated by *Acropora* spp (Obura 1997, Kemp 1998). Monospecific areas characteristic of Oman and the northern Gulf are as yet unknown from the southern Gulf.

References

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Reef sites

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