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Review Article



Corals of Andaman and Nicobar islands

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Abstract

Majority of Andaman and Nicobar reefs are fringing type occurring close to the shore which covers land area of 2000sq.km. They provide habitats for a large variety of organisms which rely on corals as a source of food and shelter. Some organisms that use corals through mutualism, commensalism and parasitism are within the taxonomic group Porifera, Polychaeta, Gastropoda, Crustacean, Echinodermata and Pisces. Its inhabitants, flora and fauna include 750 species of fishes, 1422 species of molluscs, 430 species of echinoderms, 112 species of sponges, 235 species of hard corals and 41 species of soft corals, 44 species of crustaceans, 64 species of algae and so on.

Keywords: Andaman and Nicobar reefs, taxonomic group, flora and fauna.

Introduction

The Andaman and Nicobar islands were shrouded in mystery for centuries because of their inaccessibility. These are the paragon of beauty and present a landscape full with scenic and picturesque extravaganza. These islands shimmer like emeralds in the Bay of Bengal. The dense forest which cover these islands and the innumerable exotic flowers and birds create a highly poetic and romantic atmosphere. "Here the white beaches on the edge of a meandering coastline have palm trees that sway to the rhythm of the sea. The beats of tribal drums haunt the stillness and Technicolor fish steer their way through crystal clear water".

Many people think that corals are just lifeless rocks but infact corals are animals which grow in stony skeleton. The living part of a coral is a thin layer on the outside of the colony. Generally, the coral animal is called as polyp which is small, soft tube looks like a tiny tree with its branches swaying in the water. At the top of the polyp is the mouth which is surrounded by

the finger like branches called tentacles. They are found in different shapes and sizes.

Coral reefs are among the earth's most biologically diverse ecosystems. It is the most intricate, diversified and aesthetically appealing ecosystems of this planet. A Coral reef is an assemblage of more than 3,000 living organisms in perfect harmony, a magnificent manifestation of nature's activity to create, thread and balance various life forms in space and time.

Majority of Andaman and Nicobar reefs are fringing type occurring close to the shore which covers land area of 2000sq.km. They provide habitats for a large variety of organisms which rely on corals as a source of food and shelter. Some organisms that use corals through mutualism, commensalism and parasitism are within the taxonomic group Porifera, Polychaeta, Gastropoda, Crustacean, Echinodermata and Pisces. Its inhabitants, flora and fauna include 750 species of fishes, 1422 species of molluscs, 430 species of echinoderms, 112 species of sponges, 235 species of hard corals and 41 species of soft corals, 44 species of crustaceans, 64 species of algae and so on.

CORALS IN ANDAMAN ISLANDS

(Coral Photos taken from the Naval Marine Museum –“Samudrika” of Andaman)



Coconut shell coral



Brain coral



Finger corals



Red skin island of Andaman



Coral view under the sea through magnifying glass