



CAN-048-Growing Coral-Florida

Join us to save coral reefs

Liberty Cast

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.971.7703 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

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Florida Aquarium shows off its remote greenhouse for cultivating coral, plans more

The Florida Aquarium calls its Apollo Beach greenhouse an ark, named for the biblical ship built to save pairs of animals.

The aquarium hopes the greenhouse can one day maintain genotypes of the reef-building coral species staghorn, which could then be used to regrow declining reefs.

Much more needs to be learned, but the Tampa-based aquarium has a collaborator in this quest: the National Aquarium of Cuba in Havana.

"Everyone is working together to try and solve all of the pieces of the puzzle to bring back the Florida ecosystem," said Margo McKnight, vice president of biological operations at the Florida Aquarium.

The aquarium in Tampa has sent a research team to Cuba on a few occasions as part of its collaboration. Three Cuban marine biologists will be here this month.

As part of their tour, they'll visit the greenhouse.

They will also go to Key West to watch the spawning of coral and to learn how the Tampa team collects the sperm and eggs and transports them to the greenhouse for reproduction.

Currently, the Florida researchers can reproduce the coral in the greenhouse, but it dies before growing large enough to be replanted in the Gulf of Mexico.

After they learn how to properly grow the coral in a greenhouse tank, next will be figuring out what needs to be done to enable it to survive in the wild.

"This will help us solve the mysteries around why our coral reefs are dying off the Florida coastline and around the world," said U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, who visited the \$300,000 greenhouse Tuesday.

The Tampa Democrat touted the aquarium as "one of the premiere research centers in the United States."

Studies have shown that since 1970, half of the coral reefs in Caribbean waters have died, which includes the southern end of the Gulf of Mexico.

One culprit is coastline overdevelopment in those waters.

Cuba's coral reefs remain in a near-pristine state. Development on the island was blocked by decades of isolation from the United States.

The Florida Aquarium's researchers hope to learn how to replicate Cuba's marine ecosystem.

Sea urchins, for instance, are needed to eat the algae from coral. It's why the aquarium houses a small population of sea urchins in its greenhouse.

A second greenhouse, one of eight planned, should be completed later this year. It is hoped all eight, totaling 12,000 square feet, will be done by 2020. For information about donating, see www.flaquarium.org/coral.

Coral reefs are a valuable part of the ecosystem because they reduce wave energy from storms and are home to more than 4,000 species of fish and countless species of plants.

McKnight admitted with a smile that the researchers at the Florida Aquarium wake up every morning knowing that their work could save the world.



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"This is exciting," she said. "We have a lot more to do, but we'll get there."

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/water/florida-aquarium-shows-off-its-remote-greenhouse-for-cultivating-coral/2287812>

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*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"**Edmund Burke***