Porites porites (Finger Coral)

Order: Scleractinia (Stony Corals)
Class: Anthozoa (Corals and Sea Anemones)
Phylum: Cnidaria (Corals, Sea Anemones and Jellyfish)

Fig. 1. Finger coral, *Porites porites*.

[http://coral.aims.gov.au/factsheet.jsp?speciesCode=0608, downloaded 22 October 2016]

TRAITS. The coral species *Porites porites*, also known as finger coral, appears (as the name suggests) as finger-like structures to the naked eye (Fig. 1). Its colonies are composed of branched, flat and spherical structures, some of which spread to a width of 5m across. On these structures are patches of finger like lobes which are about 2.5cm in width, which distinguishes them from other species of *Porites* which possess narrower lobes. Porites species form some of the largest coral colonies ranging up to 8m in height. These large colonies have taken an immense amount of time to form since this species has an extremely slow growth rate, about 1mm per year. They also possess tentacles which are extended even during the day, unlike other species of corals, which are only extended at night. These tentacles give the corals a fuzzy appearance (Fig. 2).

DISTRIBUTION. This coral species is distributed in a variety of coral reefs environments across the Caribbean, and some eastern Atlantic areas.

ECOLOGY. *Porites porites* can be located in most shallow water reef colonies, with depth of around 0.5-35m. They are tolerant of sedimentation (due to a thick film of mucus on their skin) and can therefore exist in back reef shallow platforms where they can be attached to mangroves, for example. *P. porites* have separate male and female colonies making fertilization and dispersal more difficult. Common to most reef corals, *P. porites* attain their energy necessary for survival by means of their tentacles catching small organisms, and zooxanthellae (microscopic algae) residing within the polyps which have a symbiotic relationship with the coral. The algae photosynthesize and produce energy molecules which are used by the finger coral in order to carry out its metabolic functions and survive. On the other hand, *P. porites* provides a habitat and protection for the zooxanthellae and allow them access to sunlight.

APPLIED BIOLOGY. *Porites porites* coral are adaptable and can be found in a variety of habitats, however, they tend to be more susceptible to disease than other coral colonies. This type of coral possesses extensive medicinal properties thus makes them also susceptible to disruption or removal for medicinal purposes. They are also very attractive and used in large amounts for decorative trade hence a proportion of interference comes from these activities. They are susceptible to pollution, loss of habitat due to other human activities and predation (particularly by *Sparisoma viride*, the spotlight parrotfish). As previously mentioned, *P. porites* corals are not heavily susceptible to sedimentation. They are also not heavily prone to bleaching (as compared to other corals).

REFERENCES

Arkive (2016). *Porites porites* (finger coral). http://www.arkive.org/finger-coral/porites-porites/, downloaded October 2016.

Coral Fact Sheets (2016). *Porites porites.* http://coral.aims.gov.au/factsheet.jsp?speciesCode=0608, downloaded October 2016.

IUCN (2016). *Porites porites*. IUCN Red List. http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/41620/0, downloaded October 2016.

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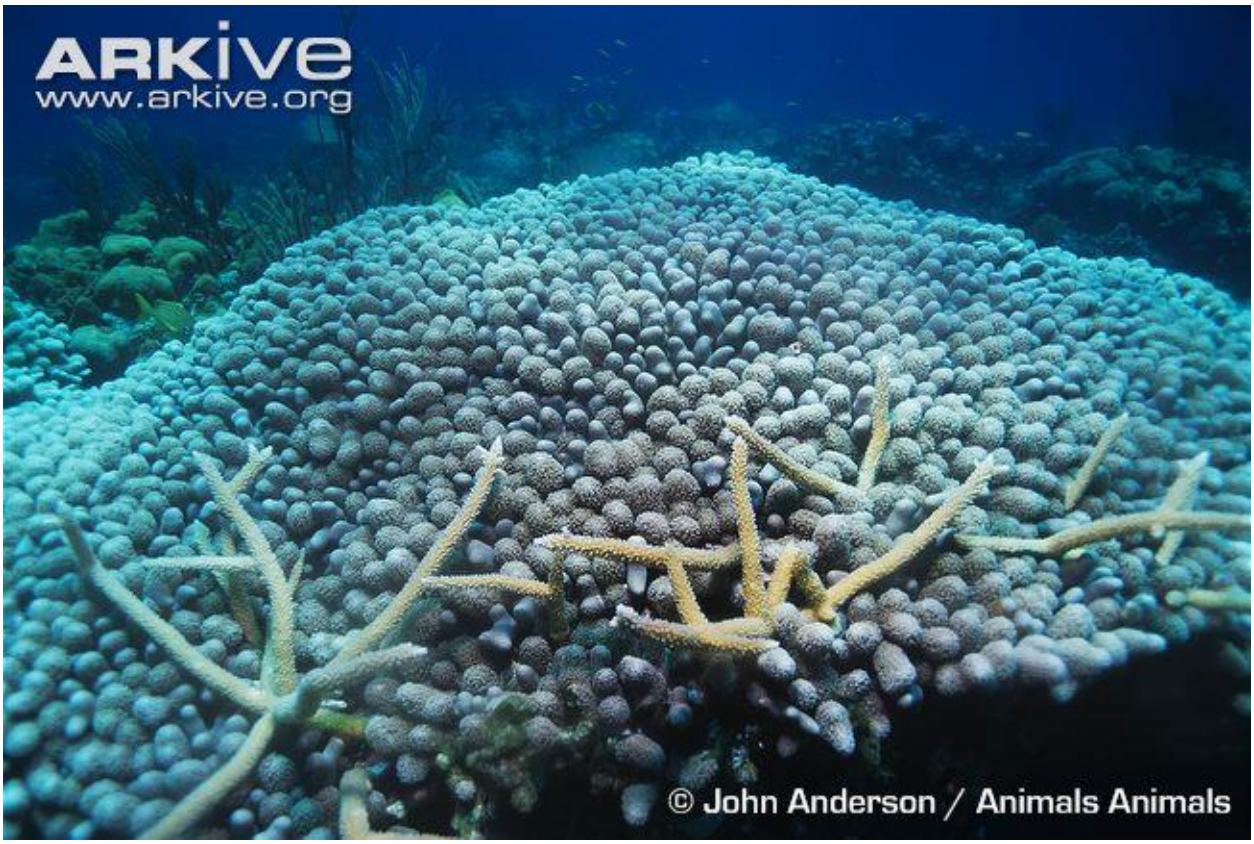

Fig. 2. *Porites porites* (finger coral), fuzzy appearance.

[http://www.arkive.org/finger-coral/porites-porites/image- downloaded 22 October 2016]