

Creep into the Deep: Discovering Deep-Sea Coral

SEAMAIL™

TO: Virtual Deep-Sea Science Team
FROM: Amy Baco-Taylor and the Deep-Sea Coral Reef Team
SUBJECT: Welcome aboard, Science Team Members

Hello Virtual Science Team,

My name is Amy Baco-Taylor. I am a scientist and a professor at Florida State University. I am the lead scientist on this deep-water coral research project.

I thought you might like to know how this project got started. A few years ago, our science team was studying how certain types of fishing affect the animals on the ocean floor. We were exploring along the Hawaiian Ridge and Emperor Seamount chains.

During our study, we had our remotely operated vehicle (ROV), deep in the ocean. Suddenly we saw something we didn't expect--coral reefs! This was an incredible find.

Reef-forming, or stony corals, make their skeletons out of calcium carbonate. When the water has too much acid in it, the calcium dissolves. That makes it very hard for the coral to build their skeleton.

This part of the ocean has the wrong kind of chemistry for reef-building corals. And that is why we did not expect to see them here.

You can imagine all the questions we had when we saw these corals!

- How can these corals be here?
- How are they building their skeletons?
- Are there more reefs we didn't know about?

We HAD to know more. When we got home from the research mission we were on, we wrote up a new plan to study the coral we had discovered.

That's the project you are learning more about right now! We are so excited to learn more. And,

Amy

Dr. Amy Baco-Taylor
Deep-Sea Explorer
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Find where we are exploring on a globe or a map of the world. Find Hawaii—way out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Put your finger on the islands and draw a line connecting them. Now keep going to the northwest far out to sea. That's the Hawaiian Seamount Chain. Would you like to explore this far out at sea?

Illustration by Paul Lopez