



‘CORAL GARDENS’ TAKE HOLD IN CAYMAN ISLANDS

HUNDREDS OF CORAL FRAGMENTS hanging from PVC pipe “trees” in the shallow waters of Grand Cayman are showing healthy signs of life and attracting fish.

The coral trees were set up in late April with the help of Sea of Change Foundation, an ocean conservation nonprofit that donated money and materials to construct the PVC trees. Experts from the Coral Restoration Foundation were brought in to help install the trees and train the dive operators how to manage the nurseries.

“Every year the foundation picks a project that we believe will make a difference in saving our seas, and this year we picked Cayman’s coral nursery program,” said board

member Jerry Beaty. “We’ve seen this method succeed in other places and because Cayman is such a prime dive destination, we want to do what we can to keep it that way.”

The coral gardens are being maintained by dive operators Ocean Frontiers, Sunset House and Divetech and will be used to replenish Cayman’s reefs. The Cayman Islands Department of Environment granted the operators permits to set up the coral nurseries and is overseeing the programs.

“So far everything looks great! There has been zero mortality from the collected coral,” says Lois Hatcher who is managing the nursery for Ocean Frontiers. “We are doing weekly maintenance on the site and setting up a report

Curious squid checking out hanging coral fragments on the “tree” at Sunset House.

PHOTO COURTESY SUNSET HOUSE

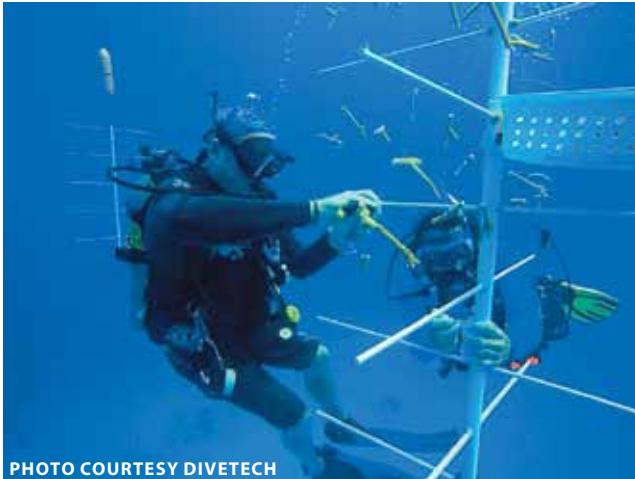


PHOTO COURTESY DIVETECH

Divers attaching coral fragments to a PVC pipe “tree” in the shallow water near Divetech. It is hoped the fragments stay healthy and grow so that they can be outplanted into areas of surrounding reefs that need it.

for the Department of Environment. The fragments are being monitored for disease, photographed and measured. They already show visible growth after just a few weeks.”

Each coral tree, which can hold about 100 coral fragments, is anchored to the sea bottom with rope and can float with the currents, even during storms and hurricanes. The coral fragments feed from the nutrient-rich currents and grow. Cayman’s nurseries contain fast-growing staghorn corals. Nursery tenders clean and maintain the coral trees to find the strongest corals, which will then be used to “seed” local reefs.

“I was out cleaning the nursery the other day and everything looks very healthy and all of the fragments have already grown over the fishing line that is attaching them to the trees. Very exciting!” says Jo Mikutowicz of Divetech.

“The staghorn has already grown between 0.5 cm to 2.5 cm based on the 5 cm baseline fragments that were hung,” Hatcher says.

The Sunset House coral nursery has attracted a small school of curious squid.

“The nursery is doing very well, and there’s also a lot of interest from guests,” general manager Keith Sahm says. “The trees are strategically placed and depth changeable to accommodate the nursery, and keep it safe from a late season nor’wester.”

Dive operators, staunch advocates for protection of the marine environment, have enforced conservation measures to reduce the stress on Cayman’s reefs from divers. The chance now to be involved in growing coral to seed and boost the reefs is exciting, they say.

“It requires a lot of work on Divetech’s part to maintain the coral trees weekly, to keep algae off of them and keep any predators (snails and fire worms) off the coral,” Mikutowicz says.

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NURSERY PROJECTS FINANCED BY SEA OF CHANGE FOUNDATION

[The Sea of Change Foundation is a nonprofit organization that donates all money it raises to ocean conservation programs. The latest recipients are six



SEA OF CHANGE FOUNDATION

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Six permits have been issued; four in Grand Cayman (Sunset House, Ocean Frontiers, Dive Tech and Cayman Eco Divers), one in Cayman Brac (Brac Scuba Shack) and one in Little Cayman (Central Caribbean Marine Institute). The CCMI in Little Cayman has been studying coral growth and nursery techniques for several years.

The Cayman Islands Coral Nursery Program is just the latest project financed by Sea of Change. In 2015, the foundation donated funding for wireless surveillance cameras to the western Pacific Ocean nation of Palau to assist them with enforcing illegal activity of fishing boats entering protected areas.

Sea of Change has no employees and is composed of individuals who can raise money and donate it to the ocean environment through education and conservation. For more information, email info@seaofchange.com or visit seaofchange.com.

CURAÇAO OUTPLANTS 360 CORALS TO CELEBRATE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

[Coral Restoration Foundation Curaçao celebrated its first year of operation by outplanting 360 new corals on Curaçao’s reefs in late May.

The effort began in May 2015 with 400 coral fragments hanging from 10 coral “trees” located on the house reef of Ocean Encounters Diving and Lions Dive and Beach Resort.

The first-year effort saw the installation of another 10 trees, and with “fragging” activities conducted by CRFC staff, volunteers, local schools and tourists, the nursery grew to contain 1,250 corals. The largest year growth for one staghorn fragment was from an initial 5 cm to 263 cm (2 to 103.5 inches). With this growth, the corals were ready to be outplanted to help restore the reefs of Curaçao. In total, 360 corals have been transplanted in Curaçao.

For more information, email info@coralrestorationcuracao.org or go coralrestoration.org.