

Coral Reefs

BUSTLING. Colourful. Vibrant. Coral reefs are incredibly busy and are some of the most important and beautiful habitats on the planet. Their humble architects are tiny marine organisms called coral. If you look at a coral closely, it is made up of thousands of identical creatures called polyps (related to jellyfish and anemones) that together form a coral colony. For most reefs, the tiny polyps create hard external skeletons which over time create coral reefs. Most corals also rely on the algae that live inside them and need sunlight and warm water to thrive. This is why coral reefs are only found in shallow water where there is plenty of sun. Corals feed by extending their tentacles to catch plankton in the surrounding water currents.

Parrotfish

This fish's front teeth are fused together to form a 'beak', which it uses to rip off chunks of coral from the reef and grind them down to extract the algae inside. Incredibly, these fish are able to change from male to female and back again throughout their life!

Bumphead parrotfish

Plate coral

Giant Clam

Brain Coral

The Great Barrier Reef

As the largest living structure on the planet, the Great Barrier Reef is mind-blowing in terms of its size and diversity. Stretching 2,300 kilometres, and covering an area roughly the size of Italy, this natural icon can be seen from outer space. Around 10% of the world's total fish species can be found just within the Great Barrier Reef.

Giant clams

The largest specimens of giant clams recorded have been over 1 metre across! Giant clams are a 'bivalve' which literally means 'two halves' referring to its two shells which, in some of the larger clams, can't actually close tightly.

Sea snakes

Sea snakes live their whole lives in the ocean. Many can't survive on land because they don't have special scales (scutes) on their bellies to grip with like land snakes. When they go underwater, they breathe through their nostrils (which are really high up on their head). They can also breathe through their skin and have just one lung which is almost as long as their body.

Nudibranchs

A nudibranch is like a sea snail without a shell. These creatures rely on bright colours and sometimes even toxic chemicals to defend themselves. They often eat dangerous creatures and then adopt the poisons in their own defence. One of the most stunning to watch is the Spanish dancer which moves, as its name suggests, like a Spanish flamenco dancer. The adults are often red with white feathery gills. They lay eggs in a delicate, coiled ribbon called a sea rose, which is laced with toxins to deter predators.

Pufferfish

Pufferfish can expand quickly to several times their normal size when disturbed. Almost all pufferfish contain a toxin, which makes them taste horrible and is deadly to other fish and humans.

Branch coral

Pufferfish

Branded sea krait

Freckled porcupine fish

Parrotfish

Spanish dancer