

Heather Wetzel Summer 2020

Coral Reef Conservation with the Virginia Aquarium

5/18/20

Presenter: Evan Culbertson

My daughter (Hope) and I participated in the Coral Reef webinar on 5/18/20. We both learned a lot about coral reefs, dangers to coral reefs, and conservation efforts.

Coral reefs are made up of tiny animals that form polyps. As they grow they form a limestone skeleton that can vary in shape, color, and size, depending on environmental factor and types of animals. Coral reefs support 25% of life in the ocean. Some reefs are 5,000 to 10,000 years old. Coral can be aged by a similar process to identifying the age of a tree. They also lay down annual rings. Coral is nocturnal and they extend their polyps to eat.

There are several significant threats to coral reefs including; physical damage, over harvesting, pollution, sedimentation, pathogens, nutrients, trash, micro-plastics, increased storms, sea levels rising, and bleaching. Bleaching occurs when environmental stressors harm the reef like temperature increases. If ocean temps increase by more than 4 degrees, mass bleaching will occur. If ocean temps increase by more than 8 degrees, mass death will occur.

Scientists are working on conservation efforts to help build and protect coral reefs. Corals can be fragmented and moved to other reefs. They can create coral reefs by transplanting new corals that have been grown in labs. Corals spawn and through larval rearing, scientists can collect the gametes that spawn once a year around the full moon. The Coral Restoration Foundation has planted more than 66,000 corals.

We can help coral reefs by education efforts, eating sustainable seafood, not giving coral as gifts, not touching corals, conserve water usage, keep chemicals out of waterways, using reef-safe sunscreen, picking up trash and after pets, and boat safety.

Attached are pictures of my daughter's notes.

