

Taxonomic status of Coral of Agalega

C. Samyan, O. Sadasing, O. Pasnin, B. Suraj, J. I. Mosaheb

Mauritius Oceanography Institute, Mauritius

Mauritius Oceanography Institute, Mauritius

Mauritius Oceanography Institute, Mauritius

Mauritius Oceanography Institute, Mauritius

Mauritius Oceanography Institute, Mauritius

csamyam@moi.intnet.mu

Agalega Islands of Republic of Mauritius, situated in the western Indian Ocean, are made up of two outer islands, north and south island. The low-lying islands have a narrow lagoon surrounded by fringing reef without natural passes. The taxonomic knowledge of corals of Agalega islands has been overlooked by the scientific community till date despite harbouring high biodiversity and providing ecosystem services to the island population. The present study was conducted to identify the hard coral species present in the waters of Agalega islands. Line transect method was used to survey at depth up to 15 meters at 20 stations, spreading over the whole Agalega Islands. Coral species were identified using digital photography and coral underwater photographs. The study was conducted over a period of 10 days in the year 2012 and over 3 days period in the year 2016. Within 20 stations, live coral cover ranged from 35.7 % to 43.2% and the corals were in good condition. 36 species of corals belonging to 8 families and 11 genera were recorded. The genus *Acropora* covered about 38.9% of the coral communities followed by the genus *Porites* representing 19.4%. Corals such as *Porites*, *Pocillopora*, *Favites*, *Montipora* were found in many sites around the island while had large colonies of *Heliopora* and, *Acropora*. Macroalgal cover at all sites was relatively low, with only three sites having greater than 30% cover. Crustose coralline algae was low in abundance with three sites exceeding 10% cover. The result of this study constitutes the first database of corals and far reaching implications in the initiation of a coral bleaching monitoring program.