
Florida Aquarium Helps Create Underwater Coral Nursery in Cuba

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An international team of divers from The Florida Aquarium and the National Aquarium of Cuba constructed an underwater staghorn coral nursery in Cuba waters, according to local media today.

The underwater coral nursery took months of planning and six days in the field. The nursery is located in the Guanahacabibes, Peninsula National Park, off the westernmost point of Cuba.

The coral nursery was created by anchoring 20 'trees' to the ocean floor, 15 feet in length and able to hold up to 60 coral fragments. The trees are able to move with the ocean waves and currents.

Once the trees were installed, they were filled with a specific staghorn coral.

The design of the tree keeps the growing corals above the sea floor, away from competition and predators.

The Florida Aquarium has been studying sexual reproduction of the staghorn coral, as it is a key, fast-growing building block for reef ecosystems.

The Director of The Florida Aquarium Center for Conservation, Scott Graves, who managed the project, said the operation was a huge success.

'I have never worked in the field with a better team. Our Cuban colleagues are highly skilled divers, knowledgeable biologists, tireless workers and a pleasure to be around,' he said.

Now, land-based 'coral greenhouses' are being constructed, where differing genotypes of coral can be preserved and living labs operated.

The Florida Aquarium said the goal is to help build these 'greenhouses' at the National Aquarium of Cuba, too.

