



PRESS RELEASE

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THE DEEP ON INTERNATIONAL MISSION TO SAVE ENDANGERED CORALS

The Deep's assistant curator is currently on a unique research expedition in the plight to save endangered corals. Andrew McLeod has joined a team of four scientists to work off the Caribbean coast of Belize, in Central America.

The Deep Curator Katy Duke explains, "Andrew, our resident coral specialist, recently set off to join the field trip organised by SECORE, an international organisation focused on coral conservation.

"The team were diving each night to witness the massive spawning event of four different species of coral – including Elkhorn and Staghorn. It is an amazing feat of nature which involves the coral releasing their gametes (sperm and eggs). Spawning only takes place over a few nights after a full moon each August, so the team have to plan accordingly. The gametes drift to the surface where fertilisation occurs. The resulting coral larvae (planulae) which swim for 2 or 3 days before sinking to the bottom, before attaching themselves to rocks where they become primary polyps, growing into larger coral colonies over time. In the wild, coral is severely threatened, so SECORE's main aim is to restore reefs.

"During the spawning, scientists collect the delicate 'gametes' in specially designed nets and fertilise them in a laboratory on land. Once fertilised, they are carefully transported to participating aquariums. Andrew will be returning to Hull with some larvae which will settle out and grow in a specially prepared coral table in The Deep's quarantine facility."

On the ocean reefs, coral survival is threatened by rising sea temperatures associated with climate change, overfishing and pollution. By culturing the embryonic corals so that they reach maturity and then by returning them to the ocean, SECORE aims to restore depleted/threatened/damaged reefs. Each year, SECORE works at different locations.

Photo opportunity: 12 noon Wednesday August 25th, Deep aquarist Seb Prajsnar can be photographed preparing the aquarium's coral culturing facility, ready for Andrew's return.

Background

1. SECORE (Sexual Coral Reproduction) is an international organisation, investigating the sexual reproduction of coral. It aims to help restore endangered coral populations around the world.

<http://www.secore.org/>

2. The two coral species the SECORE team are working with in the Caribbean are Elkhorn (*Acropora palmata*) Staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*).

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