

# A DIVE INTO THE WORLD OF CORAL

# 03

## CORAL DIVERSITY. THE HEXACORALS AND THE OCTOCORALS, THE HARD AND THE SOFT.

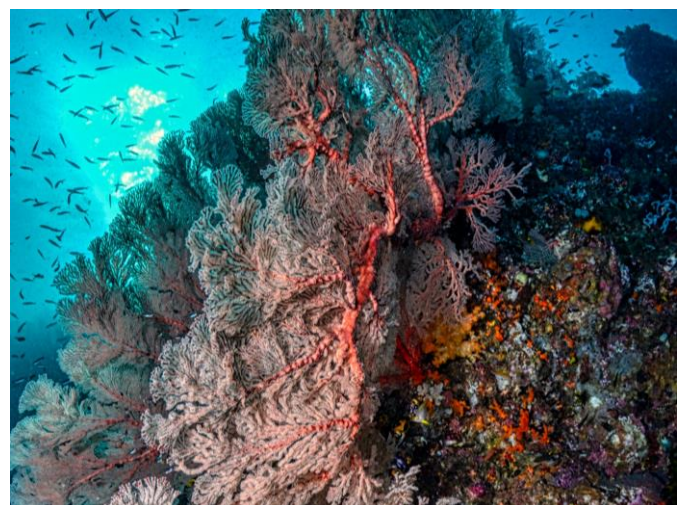
Identifying the principal patterns, and recognising the biodiversity of corals is a requirement for effective ecosystem management. In very simple terms, they broadly fall into two types that display two very different but unique characteristics.

In the so-called stony corals that compose most tropical reefs, each polyp sits in a cup made of calcium carbonate.

Stony corals are the most important reef builders, but organ-pipe corals, precious red corals, and blue corals also have stony skeletons. There are corals as well that use more flexible materials or tiny stiff rods to build their skeletons. These include the sea fans and sea rods, the rubbery soft corals, and the black corals.

The family tree of the animals we call corals is complicated, and some groups are more closely related to each other than are others. All but the fire corals (named for their strong sting) are anthozoans, which are then divided into two main groups.

1. **THE HEXACORALS** (including the true stony corals and black corals, as well as the sea anemones) have smooth tentacles, often in multiples of six; and
2. **THE OCTOCORALS** (that include the soft corals, sea fans, organ-pipe corals and blue corals) have eight tentacles, each of which has tiny branches running along the sides.



All corals are in the animal phylum (division) Cnidaria, the same as for jellyfish and sea anemones. But unlike sea anemones, the corals secrete hard carbonate exoskeletons that provide support and protection to the colony.