Coral Reef Goes Digital

Can computers help save this endangered habitat?

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Live from Australia, it's the Great Barrier Reef! Scientists are using special **sensors,** known as digital skins, to monitor changes in this underwater treasure.

The sensors are devices that record changes in the ocean and send up-to-the-minute information to computers. Until now, scientists were able to monitor changes only after they had occurred. Scientists hope the new information will help them learn how to better care for coral reefs.

Reef Rescue

Coral reefs around the world are in trouble. Fishing nets and ships damage the reefs and break off sections of them. Natural disasters and pollution are also doing harm. At the same time, warmer sea temperatures cause the **coral** to die.

Although coral may look like a plant, it is actually made up of tiny sea animals called **polyps**[1]**.** As polyps die, they leave behind hard shells.

1 **polyps:** very small sea creatures

Other polyps grow on top of the shells. Over many years, the polyps form coral reefs.

Coral reefs play a very important role in ocean life. They supply food and shelter to thousands of different types of ocean creatures living in and around the reefs. People also depend on coral reefs for jobs, food, and medicine to treat diseases.

"Coral reefs are incredibly threatened," Rick MacPherson of California's Coral Reef Alliance told *Weekly Reader.* "They require, now more than ever, that people pay attention and work toward protecting them."

The Great Barrier Reef

Leigh Haeger

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef in the world. It stretches 1,250 miles along the northeast coast of Australia.