

Increasingly intense storms threaten coral

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A British scientist suggests hurricanes and other storms are increasing in intensity and are limiting the growth of some corals.

The Earthwatch Institute-supported study focused on the ability of corals in Belize to "recruit" new coral into their communities.

"Increasing evidence now shows that storms are becoming more intense due to climate change," said lead author and Earthwatch scientist James Crabbe from the University of Bedfordshire.

Coral reefs, which can expand for thousands of years, form when free-swimming coral larvae in the ocean attach to rocks or other hard surfaces and begin to develop.

"If the storms don't destroy corals outright, they render them more susceptible to disease," said Crabbe, "and that is certainly apparent on the Belize reefs."

He said his findings have implications for marine park managers. "They may need to assist coral recruitment and settlement (during hurricane years) by establishing coral nurseries and then placing the baby corals (larvae) in the reef at discrete locations" or by setting up artificial reef blocks to help the corals survive.

The research that included Edwin Martinez, Earthwatch field director in Belize, appears in the May issue of the journal *Marine Environmental Research*.

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