

# Sponge species and occurrence recorded in benthic surveys at sites on Caribbean coral reefs, 2008-2012 (Sponge Chem Ecology project)

**Website:** <https://www.bco-dmo.org/dataset/683407>

**Data Type:** Other Field Results

**Version:** 1

**Version Date:** 2017-02-28

## Project

» [Chemical ecology of sponges on Caribbean coral reefs](#) (Sponge Chem Ecology)

Contributors	Affiliation	Role
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## Abstract

This dataset contains species abundance information for benthic community surveys that were conducted on coral reefs at 69 sites from 12 countries across the Tropical Northwestern Atlantic (Caribbean) marine province from 2008 to 2012.

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## Coverage

**Spatial Extent:** N:25.75527 E:-61.06267 S:9.24195 W:-87.43235

**Temporal Extent:** 2008-08-20 - 2012-07-08

## Dataset Description

This dataset contains species abundance information for benthic community surveys that were conducted on coral reefs at 69 sites from 12 countries across the Tropical Northwestern Atlantic (Caribbean) marine province from 2008 to 2012.

**Related Reference:** Loh, T.-L. and Pawlik, J.R. (2014). [Author's pdf: <http://people.uncw.edu/pawlikj/2014PNASLoh.pdf>] This dataset appears as Suppl. Info. Dataset S2 (XLSX).

## Methods & Sampling

From Loh, T.-L., and Pawlik, J.R. (2014) PNAS. See paper for citations referred to below:

**Study Sites and Benthic Community Surveys.** Surveys were conducted on coral reefs at 69 sites from 12 countries across the Tropical Northwestern Atlantic marine province (referred to herein as "Caribbean" for brevity) from 2008 to 2012. At each location, sponge community data and fish densities were recorded at 3-11 geographically distinct sites (>2 km apart) by a team of three to four that only included personnel from among the same five surveyors to minimize interobserver subjectivity. Transect lines were laid out along a contiguous section of the reef at 10-20 m (except for the shallow reefs off Bocas del Toro, Panama, and two sites off Key Largo, FL, 2-7 m). Surveys of sponge cover were carried out using a technique adapted from past studies (35) by evenly placing a 1 × 1 m<sup>2</sup> quadrat at 5 points along a 20-m transect line, with 5 replicate transects laid end-to-end at the same depth (total of 25 quadrats and 625 points per survey site). All sponges were identified to species (36), and when necessary, identifications were confirmed by Sven Zea (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Santa Marta, Colombia) using microscopic examination of spicule mounts or tissue sections. Sponge species were categorized as chemically defended, consistently undefended, or variably defended based on data from laboratory feeding assays using the bluehead, *Thalassoma bifasciatum*, that were either conducted in the past (11, 26, 28) or performed for this study using the same methods (Table S2).

## Data Processing Description

### BCO-DMO Processing notes:

- added conventional header with dataset name, PI name, version date
- modified parameter names to conform with BCO-DMO naming conventions
- replaced or removed special characters
- replaced spaces with underscores
- original dataset was joined with site data (location, lat, lon, depth, date)
- changed spelling of several species names to agree with accepted names from World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS)

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## Data Files

File
<b>sponge_species_joined.csv</b> (Comma Separated Values (.csv), 20.94 KB) MD5:f268a9367e9aa0f1d4a5820ca3e09935
Primary data file for dataset ID 683407

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## Related Publications

Loh, T.-L., & Pawlik, J. R. (2014). Chemical defenses and resource trade-offs structure sponge communities on Caribbean coral reefs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(11), 4151–4156.  
doi:[10.1073/pnas.1321626111](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1321626111)  
*Results*

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## Related Datasets

### IsRelatedTo

Pawlik, J., Loh, T. (2021) **Sponge community survey site descriptions on Caribbean coral reefs, 2008-2012 (Sponge Chem Ecology project)**. Biological and Chemical Oceanography Data Management Office (BCO-DMO). (Version 1) Version Date 2017-03-01 doi:10.26008/1912/bco-dmo.683255.1 [[view at BCO-DMO](#)]

## Parameters

*Parameters for this dataset have not yet been identified*

## Deployments

### Pawlik\_Caribbean

<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.bco-dmo.org/deployment/683263">https://www.bco-dmo.org/deployment/683263</a>
<b>Platform</b>	Caribbean_Coral_Reefs
<b>Start Date</b>	2008-08-20
<b>End Date</b>	2012-07-08
<b>Description</b>	Benthic surveys

## Project Information

### Chemical ecology of sponges on Caribbean coral reefs (Sponge Chem Ecology)

**Website:** <http://people.uncw.edu/pawlikj/chemical.html>

**Coverage:** Caribbean Sea

#### NSF Award Abstract:

Sponges are now the dominant habitat-forming animals on most Caribbean coral reefs. Unlike corals and some macroalgae, sponges have uncalcified skeletons, and are less prone to effects of ocean acidification. A recently published demographic study of the giant barrel sponge on the Florida Keys reefs showed population increases by ~40% between 2000 and 2006. This renewal project would investigate the chemical ecology of Caribbean reef sponges, a group whose taxonomy and secondary metabolites are well described. Some reef sponges produce chemical defenses, while others are subject to grazing by fish predators. The collective community is found over a large biogeographic area where variable anthropogenic impacts permit the testing of fundamental hypotheses about ecosystem function, indirect effects, and resource allocation.

Intellectual merits: Previous NSF-funded research has transformed understanding of Caribbean coral reef ecosystems. A survey of chemical, structural and nutritional anti-predatory defenses of over 70 species of Caribbean sponges, followed by field experiments using natural populations of reef fishes, resulted in the isolation and identification of deterrent compounds from over 15 species. A series of manipulative experiments clearly demonstrated that sponge-eating fishes limit sponge distributions, and that parrotfishes are major spongivores, thereby overturning conventional ideas about effects of sponge-eating fishes on reef communities. Novel gel-based assays revealed differential allelopathic effects of sponge metabolites against other sponge and coral species. The ecosystem model for Caribbean reefs thus involves trophic and competitive interactions, predicting cascades and indirect effects known for other ecosystems.

Three primary objectives for testing the ecosystem model are to: (1) extend studies of top-down control of the sponge community. Guided by the World Resources Institute "Reefs at Risk" database, predictions and comparisons will be made of the community structure of sponges and their predators on overfished vs. well-protected reefs across sub-regions of the Caribbean. Parrotfish predation on sponges will be video recorded during food choice experiments on differently impacted reefs. Studies of allelopathic competitive interactions between sponges and corals (sponge metabolites on coral photosynthesis and bleaching) will continue using a modified gel-based field assay and diving-PAM fluorometry; (2) improve testing of the alternative hypothesis

that bottom-up processes -- availability of picoplankton as food -- control reef communities. Predator-exclusion experiments will decouple effects of predation from sponge growth at picoplankton-rich and -poor, deep- and shallow-reef sites; (3) expand studies of sponge life history trade-offs in resource allocation between chemical defense, growth and reproduction. Differences in recruitment and succession will be examined among sponge communities of known age on artificial reef surfaces. This component builds on the recent discovery of sponge community succession on the deck of the Spiegel Grove shipwreck off Key Largo, FL, which strongly suggests a resource trade-off between chemical defenses and reproduction or growth.

Broader impacts: Renewal of this research program will provide (1) support and training for undergraduate and graduate students at a teaching-intensive, predominantly MS-level university (>68% of direct costs for student support), (2) collaboration between scientists and students from the US and abroad on three 2-week research cruises, (3) web-based outreach, including updated links on the demographics, bleaching, and chemical defenses of Caribbean sponges and further refinement of an easy-to-use photographic key to sponges of the Caribbean. Results of this project will be useful in judging the general applicability of chemical defense theories derived from studies of terrestrial ecosystems, while advancing understanding of the complex relationships between benthic invertebrates, their predators and their competitors in coral reef environments where the effects of global climate change and ocean acidification may be tipping the competitive balance toward non-calcifying organisms, such as sponges.

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## Funding

Funding Source	Award
<a href="#">NSF Division of Ocean Sciences (NSF OCE)</a>	<a href="#">OCE-1029515</a>

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