

# Octocoral Recruitment surveys on transects at 6 sites on the south shore of St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands in 2021 and 2022

**Website:** <https://www.bco-dmo.org/dataset/893866>

**Data Type:** Other Field Results

**Version:** 1

**Version Date:** 2023-04-18

## Project

» [Collaborative Research: Pattern and process in the abundance and recruitment of Caribbean octocorals](#)  
(Octocoral Community Dynamics)

Contributors	Affiliation	Role
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## Abstract

This dataset represents octocoral recruitment censuses conducted on survey transects at 6 sites Booby Rock (18° 18.176' N; 064° 42.626' W), Grootpan Bay (previously noted as E Cabritte or East Cabritte 18° 18.551' N; 064° 43.129' W), Europa (18° 19.003' N; 064° 43.796' W), Tektite (18° 18.775' N; 064° 43.796' W), Deep Tektite: (18° 18.582' N, 064° 43.371 W), Yawzi (18° 18.912' N, 064° 43.500' W) on the south shore of St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands between 2021 and 2022.

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## Coverage

**Spatial Extent:** N:18.73 E:-64.71 S:18.303 W:-64.73

**Temporal Extent:** 2021-07-04 - 2022-08-20

## Methods & Sampling

Recruit censuses were conducted in 2021 and 2021. Recruits (1 polyp - 5 centimeters tall) were enumerated, and when possible were identified to genus level in separate 0.25 square meter quadrats randomly placed (n = 8) along 6 transects at each of 3 sites (48 quadrats per site). Transects were positioned in a marked 50-meter x 10-meter area, with stainless steel eye bolts marking each corner, and each of the 6 transects. Transects were 10 meters long across the area.

### Transect positions by site:

- Europa, Grootpan, and Tektite: transects were positioned in a marked 50 x 10 meter area, with stainless steel eye bolts marking each corner, and each of the 6 transects. Transects were 10 meters long across the area. So there were 0 meters; 10 meters; 20 meters; 30 meters; 40 meters; 50 meters.

- Booby Rock: Surveys at Booby Rock were added in 2022. Transects were positioned at random points along a 100-meter line run parallel to the shore. Transects ran downslope for 10 meters from the point on the 100-meter line.

- Deep Tektite, Yawzi: Three 10-meter transects positioned 10 meters apart along the reef edge and running perpendicular to the reef edge. 0.25 square meter quadrats were randomly placed (n = 16) along 3 transects at each site (48 quadrats per site).

#### **Known Issues:**

*Eunicea* spp. recruits that could not be identified to species were grouped into three groups based on the size of calyces:

*Eunicea* sp g1 - large polyps - *Eunicea calyculata/clavigera/tournefortii/laciniata*

*Eunicea* sp g2 - intermediate size with tubular calyces - *Eunicea succinea/mammosa/laxispica*

*Eunicea* sp g3 - small polyps - *Eunicea asperula/flexuosa/knighti/palmeri/pinta/pallida*

#### **Notes:**

- Octocoral recruits are defined as individuals greater than 5 centimeters in height.

- 8 quadrats were surveyed by transect but a few transects present differences in the number of quadrats surveyed.

- 0.1 centimeter or greater than 0.1 centimeter recruits are those with 1, 2, or 3 polyps and therefore not measurable.

- In the comments column: "No recruits present " indicates those quadrats surveyed without recruits.

## **Data Processing Description**

### **BCO-DMO Processing description:**

- Adjusted field/parameter names to comply with BCO-DMO naming conventions

- Missing data identifier 'na' replaced with blank (BCO-DMO's default missing data identifier)

- Added columns "Latitude" and "Longitude" based on site locations

- Rounded columns "Latitude" and "Longitude" to 3 decimal places

- Merged 2021 data and 2022 data into one dataset

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## **Related Datasets**

### **IsRelatedTo**

Lasker, H., Edmunds, P. J., Wells, C. (2023) **Identity and heights of Octocoral species found on transects at 6 sites on the south shore of St John, U.S. Virgin Islands in 2021 and 2022.** Biological and Chemical Oceanography Data Management Office (BCO-DMO). (Version 1) Version Date 2023-04-18 <http://lod.bco-dmo.org/id/dataset/893615> [[view at BCO-DMO](#)]

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## **Parameters**

Parameter	Description	Units
Census_Year	Year the data were collected	unitless
Date	Date the survey was conducted	unitless
Latitude	Latitude of the survey site	decimal degrees
Longitude	Longitude of the survey site (West is negative)	decimal degrees
Site	Name of sampling site	unitless
Transect_Position	Position of transects in a marked 50 x 10 meter area (see acquisition description for details)	unitless
Side_of_transect	Side of the transect tape (Left or Right), orientation looking towards open ocean, with the shore in the back.	unitless
Meter_on_transect	From 0 meters to 9.5 meters. Quadrat of 50 x 50 centimeter positioned randomly along a 10 meter transect. Each number indicates the meter at which the inferior side of the quadrat was positioned.	meters
Taxon	Genus and species of the colony or in the case of species that cannot be differentiated in the field the name of species group	unitless
Genus	Genus of the coral colony	unitless
Height	Height to nearest 0.1 cm, measured from the base of the recruit to the top of the living tissue. Measurement of 0.1 centimeters or greater than 0.1 centimeters are recruits with 1, 2 or 3 polyps, which were not measurable.	centimeters (cm)
Comments	Bitten tip of the recruit shows evidence of the tip having been bitten off, "Skel above" or "additional xx cm above stripped" refers to the presence of bare axis at the tip of the recruit. The bare axis was not included in the height measurement.	unitless

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## Instruments

<b>Dataset-specific Instrument Name</b>	Transect tape
<b>Generic Instrument Name</b>	Measuring Tape
<b>Generic Instrument Description</b>	A tape measure or measuring tape is a flexible ruler. It consists of a ribbon of cloth, plastic, fibre glass, or metal strip with linear-measurement markings. It is a common tool for measuring distance or length.

<b>Dataset-specific Instrument Name</b>	
<b>Generic Instrument Name</b>	Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus
<b>Generic Instrument Description</b>	The self-contained underwater breathing apparatus or scuba diving system is the result of technological developments and innovations that began almost 300 years ago. Scuba diving is the most extensively used system for breathing underwater by recreational divers throughout the world and in various forms is also widely used to perform underwater work for military, scientific, and commercial purposes. Reference: <a href="http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/technology/diving/diving.html">http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/technology/diving/diving.html</a>

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## Project Information

### **Collaborative Research: Pattern and process in the abundance and recruitment of Caribbean octocorals (Octocoral Community Dynamics)**

**Coverage:** St. John, US Virgin Islands

#### *NSF Award Abstract:*

Coral reefs are exposed to a diversity of natural and anthropogenic disturbances, and the consequences for ecosystem degradation have been widely publicized. However, the reported changes have been biased towards fishes and stony corals, and for Caribbean reefs, the most notable example of this bias are octocorals ("soft corals"). Although they are abundant and dominate many Caribbean reefs, they are rarely included in studies due to the difficulty of both identifying them and in quantifying their abundances. In some places there is compelling evidence that soft corals have increased in abundance, even while stony corals have become less common. This suggests that soft corals are more resilient than stony corals to the wide diversity of disturbances that have been impacting coral reefs. The best coral reefs on which to study these changes are those that have been studied for decades and can provide a decadal context to more recent events, and in this regard the reefs of St. John, US Virgin Islands are unique. Stony corals on the reefs have been studied since 1987, and the soft corals from 2014. This provides unrivalled platform to evaluate patterns of octocoral abundance and recruitment; identify the patterns of change that are occurring on these reefs, and identify the processes responsible for the resilience of octocoral populations. The project will extend soft coral monitoring from 4 years to 8 years, and within this framework will examine the roles of baby corals, and their response to seafloor roughness, seawater flow, and seaweed, in determining the success of soft corals. The work will also assess whether the destructive effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria have modified the pattern of change. In concert with these efforts the project will be closely integrated with local high schools at which the investigators will host marine biology clubs and provide independent study opportunities for their students and teachers. Unique training opportunities will be provided to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as a postdoctoral researcher, all of whom will study and work in St. John, and the investigators will train coral reef researchers to identify the species of soft corals through a hands-on workshop to be conducted in the Florida Keys.

Understanding how changing environmental conditions will affect the community structure of major biomes is the ecological objective defining the 21st century. The holistic effects of these conditions on coral reefs will be studied on shallow reefs within the Virgin Islands National Park in St. John, US Virgin Islands, which is the site of one of the longest-running, long-term studies of coral reef community dynamics in the region. With NSF-LTREB support, the investigators have been studying long-term changes in stony coral communities in this location since 1987, and in 2014 NSF-OCE support was used to build an octocoral "overlay" to this decadal perspective. The present project extends from this unique history, which has been punctuated by the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, to place octocoral synecology in a decadal context, and the investigators exploit a rich suite of legacy data to better understand the present and immediate future of Caribbean coral reefs. This four-year project will advance on two concurrent fronts: first, to extend time-series analyses of octocoral communities from four to eight years to characterize the pattern and pace of change in community structure, and second,

to conduct a program of hypothesis-driven experiments focused on octocoral settlement that will uncover the mechanisms allowing octocorals to more effectively colonize substrata than scleractinian corals on present day reefs. Specifically, the investigators will conduct mensurative and manipulative experiments addressing four hypotheses focusing on the roles of: (1) habitat complexity in distinguishing between octocoral and scleractinian recruitment niches, (2) the recruitment niche in mediating post-settlement success, (3) competition in algal turf and macroalgae in determining the success of octocoral and scleractinian recruits, and (4) role of octocoral canopies in modulating the flux of particles and larvae to the seafloor beneath. The results of this study will be integrated to evaluate the factors driving higher ecological resilience of octocorals versus scleractinians on present-day Caribbean reefs.

This award reflects NSF's statutory mission and has been deemed worthy of support through evaluation using the Foundation's intellectual merit and broader impacts review criteria.

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## Funding

Funding Source	Award
<a href="#">NSF Division of Ocean Sciences (NSF OCE)</a>	<a href="#">OCE-1756381</a>

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