**Related Species**

There is just one other true *Acropora* species in the Greater Caribbean, the staghorn coral. It was thought that there were a total of three species but genetic studies have shown the fused staghorn coral to be a hybrid of the elkhorn and staghorn corals. There are over 150 species of *Acropora* in the Pacific ocean.

---

**Threats**

Coral reefs are subject to many natural and human impacts. Boats, anchors, coastal development, and diseases such as coral bleaching and white band disease have substantially reduced elkhorn, and other, coral populations. The elkhorn and staghorn (below) corals have been listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act as "Threatened Species."

---

**Ecological Significance**

Branches broken off by storms may survive and form new colonies, a form of asexual reproduction. In this way, large elkhorn thickets can be formed in the shallow portions of reefs. Their complicated shapes provide a variety of refuges for fish, spiny lobsters and other reef inhabitants. The relatively fast growth of elkhorn corals has allowed them to keep up with sea level rise and they have been responsible for much of the structure seen on reefs of the Greater Caribbean today.

---

**Life Cycle**

- Many corals spawn by "broadcasting" eggs and sperm (gametes) into the water a few days after the full moon of late summer. Elkhorn corals release gametes "synchronously" that will break up at the surface to release the gametes. Other coral species release only sperm that then fertilize eggs held in other colonies. The fertilized eggs are brooding species and also on a lunar cycle but occur more frequently during the year.

- The polyp immediately begins secreting a limestone skeleton that may eventually weight several tons.

- Although coral skeletons may become massive, they are very delicate when examined closely. Each polyp looks like a small anemone lying within a limestone cup, the calyx. Each coral species has a unique calyx structure as well as colony shape.

- Most corals grow just 3-10 mm (0.1-0.4 in) each year. Elkhorn corals may grow more than 50 mm (2.0 in) in a single year.

- Most corals spawn by "broadcasting" eggs and sperm (gametes) into the water a few days after the full moon of late summer. Elkhorn corals release gametes "synchronously" that will break up at the surface to release the gametes. Other coral species release only sperm that then fertilize eggs held in other colonies. The fertilized eggs are brooding species and also on a lunar cycle but occur more frequently during the year.

- The polyp immediately begins secreting a limestone skeleton that may eventually weight several tons.

- Although coral skeletons may become massive, they are very delicate when examined closely. Each polyp looks like a small anemone lying within a limestone cup, the calyx. Each coral species has a unique calyx structure as well as colony shape.

- The polyp immediately begins secreting a limestone skeleton that may eventually weight several tons.

- Although coral skeletons may become massive, they are very delicate when examined closely. Each polyp looks like a small anemone lying within a limestone cup, the calyx. Each coral species has a unique calyx structure as well as colony shape.

- The polyp immediately begins secreting a limestone skeleton that may eventually weight several tons.

- Although coral skeletons may become massive, they are very delicate when examined closely. Each polyp looks like a small anemone lying within a limestone cup, the calyx. Each coral species has a unique calyx structure as well as colony shape.

---

**Heterotrophy**

Most corals are both heterotrophic (catching nutrition from outside sources) and autotrophic (relying on photosynthesis from symbiotic algae).

**Autotrophy**

Most of the color in reef corals is due to the presence of one-celled plants called zooxanthellae (zoo-xan-thel-e) within the endodermal cells of the coral animal. The relationship is a type of symbiosis known as "mutualism" where each partner benefits.

**Threats**

Coral reefs are subject to many natural and human impacts. Boats, anchors, coastal development, and diseases such as coral bleaching and white band disease have substantially reduced elkhorn, and other, coral populations. The elkhorn and staghorn (below) corals have been listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act as "Threatened Species."

---

**Coral Nutrition**

Most corals are both heterotrophic (catching nutrition from outside sources) and autotrophic (relying on photosynthesis from symbiotic algae).