

Great Barrier Reef

Location

The Great Barrier Reef is an enormous living formation in Australia. It consists of 2,900 individual reefs and over 900 islands. The Great Barrier Reef is located in the Coral Sea which is off the coast of Queensland. It stretches along the Queensland coast from near the southern town of Bundaberg to Cape York. It is a popular tourist attraction with over 2 million visitors every year.



Size

The Great Barrier Reef is a staggering 2,600 kilometres long. It is not only the world's largest reef but also the world's largest living structure. The Great Barrier Reef is bigger than Tasmania and Victoria put together. Astronauts can even see it from space!

Animals

The Great Barrier Reef is home to many thousands of animals, such as fish, sea turtles, giant clams, seahorses, sea snakes, stingrays, sharks and more. One of the most interesting is the dugong. These unusual-looking animals are closely related to dolphins and whales. They are large mammals and are herbivores. Dugongs feed on the many plants of the Great Barrier Reef. They are hunted by sharks and saltwater crocodiles. Today, there are more than 50,000 dugongs living in Australian waters.



Plankton can also be found in the waters around the Great Barrier Reef. Plankton are tiny drifting organisms that live in the top layers of the ocean. They are not strong enough to swim against ocean current, which is why they drift. Plankton are important in the ocean's food chain because they are the main source of food for almost all fish. Some sharks and whales feed on them directly, while other large fish feed on them indirectly, by eating fish of smaller size which have eaten plankton.

Coral

Many different types of coral grow in the Great Barrier Reef. Most are types of coral and sea sponge. 360 species of hard coral grow there, including: bottlebrush coral, bubble coral, brain coral, mushroom coral, staghorn coral, tabletop coral and needle coral. Hard corals grow in shallow water and help build the structure of coral reefs. They grow in several forms, such as mounds, plates, and branches. When a coral colony dies, a new one will grow on top of the skeletons of the dead coral. This creates three-dimensional architecture. Hot weather and warm water is bad for coral and causes coral bleaching. This means they lose their natural colour and become a white, greyish colour. Coral bleaching is common in the Great Barrier Reef due to the fact it is in such a warm, tropical climate.

Indigenous People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are the traditional owners of the Great Barrier Reef. More than 70 Indigenous tribes have ownership over parts of the Great Barrier Reef. Many animals that live there are important to Aboriginal Dreaming, specifically the turtle and dugong. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have used the sea to give them food for thousands of years. Today, food from the sea is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who still collect food and prepare meals using their traditional methods.



Questions

1. Where is the Great Barrier Reef?

2. Which two states is the Great Barrier Reef bigger than?

1. _____

2. _____

3. How is it possible that astronauts can see it from outer space?

4. Are dugongs extinct? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Why are plankton important to the Great Barrier Reef?

6. What is the difference between directly and indirectly eating plankton?

7. What are the causes of coral bleaching?

8. Using information from the text, draw and label what happens when a coral colony dies.