

CORAL REEFS:

fringing, bank, barrier and linear reefs



Location

Good Examples:

St. Croix—Buck Island, Turner Hole, Jack and Isaac Bays, Lang Bank.
St. Thomas—Saba and Flat Cays, Great Hans Lollick, Cow and Calf.
St. John—Newfound Bay, Hawksnest Bay, Waterlemon Cay.

Community Description

A coral reef is a hardened substrate of mounded relief formed by the deposition of calcium carbonate by reef-building corals and other organisms, relict or ongoing. This category includes the reef crest, back reef, and fore reef areas.



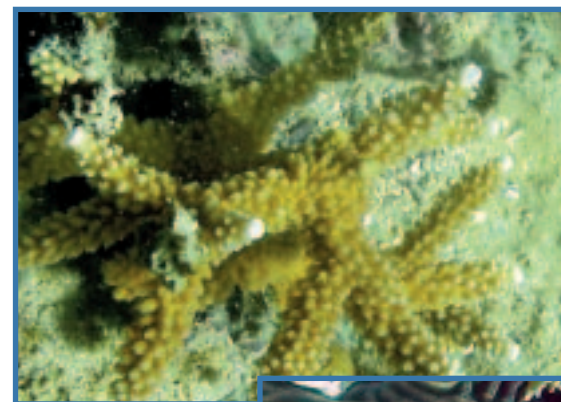
The reef crest is the shallow and often emergent portion of the reef, usually colonized by fire coral (*Millepora* spp.) and other wave-resistant invertebrates and emergent coral. It is a high-energy wave area often visible in aerial images.



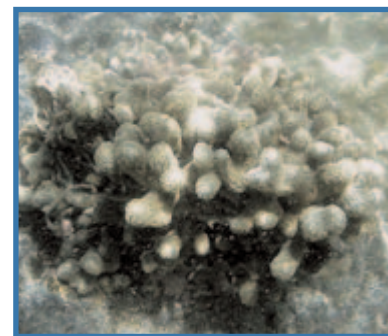
Elkhorn coral grows at the reef crest.

The upper fore reef habitat is sometimes found near shore, usually in the seaward shallow portions of fringing or barrier-type reefs from the reef crest to approximately 3 meters (10 feet) in depth. It is comprised of highly branching elkhorn coral (*A. palmata*), but other species may be present, including finger coral (*P. porites*), mustard hill coral (*P. astreoides*), lettuce coral (*A. agaricites*), brain coral (*Diploria* sp.), and fire coral (*Millepora* sp.) The predominance of elkhorn coral produces a structurally complex habitat with good capacity to act as refuge and shelter.

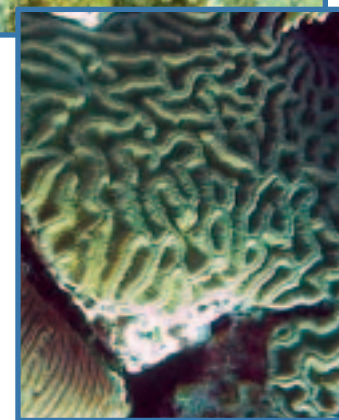
The back reef is that portion of the reef that is landward of the reef crest. Behind the back reef, shallow lagoons may form, creating a protected area. In some cases, the back reef slope to the bottom of the back reef lagoon is steep and composed of large interlocking pieces of dead elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*), which provide good shelter for the many species of fish found here. The floor of the lagoon is usually sand and may be colonized with patches of seagrass, algae, and the upside-down jellyfish, *Cassiopeia frondosa*.



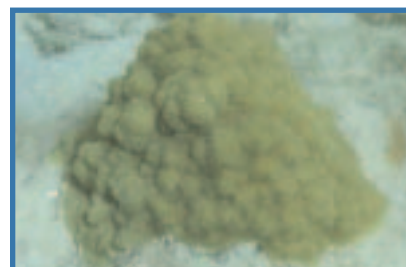
Staghorn coral



Finger coral



Brain coral



Mustard hill coral

As a result of this complexity, this habitat serves as a principal daytime refuge for many species of fish that forage away from the reef at night in the adjacent seagrass beds and pavement areas (e.g., grunts and snappers). It may also be used at night by many species that rest here, hidden in the many crevices and caves.