

International Coral Reef Symposium 2008

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The 2008 International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) was held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, July 7 to 11. It marked the 11th time the ICRS has been held and just the second time the event has taken place in the United States. The 2008 ICRS was attended by nearly 2,800 scientists, resource managers, educators and journalists. Some 114 countries were represented at the event.

There were also 2,500 scientific abstracts presented during the five-day event. The theme was "Reefs for the Future," which was apropos, especially in light of the large-scale changes facing coral reefs today.

One of the 2008 ICRS highlights was a collection of antiquarian coral books — some dating to the 16th century — that Professor James Porter kindly brought from his library for all to enjoy.

Organization was the name of the game at the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium. This is just a small sampling of the many hundreds of scientific presentations given at this year's event. Karrie Carnes, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration communications specialist, fields questions at NOAA's information booth, which was located in the ICRS exhibitor area.

Florida has the third longest barrier reef in the world. While Florida's coral resources have been compromised in many areas, there are still many areas with beautiful corals, interesting invertebrates and spectacular fish. This patch of golf ball coral (*Favia fragum*) is growing on the moat wall of Ft. Jefferson, a Civil War-era fort and centerpiece of Dry Tortugas National Park, 70 miles due west of Key West, Florida. Terry Hughes, Ph.D., director of the Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, James Cook University, Townsville, Australia, receives the 2008 Darwin Medal at the 2008 ICRS. Richard Aronson, Ph.D., president of the International Society for Reef Studies (ISRS), presents Hughes with the award. The Darwin Medal is awarded to a person of merit by the ISRS every four years when the ICRS convenes.

Pictured is the exhibitor area at this year's ICRS. Snorkelers ply the turquoise waters of Dry Tortugas National Park while looking for a myriad of sea life.

There were more than 1,230 poster presentations given at the ICRS. Virtually every reef area on the globe was represented in these scientific presentations. There were plenty of highlights at the 2008 ICRS, including a banquet complete with a live band and dancing.

This spectacular marlin sculpture greeted 2008 ICRS participants outside the Broward County Convention Center, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Between sessions, many ICRS attendees took time out to visit the many educational and informational booths in the main exhibitor area.

These incredible renditions are from a book from the U.S. Exploring Expedition (1838 to 1842). The US Navy embarked on a four-year scientific circumnavigation of the oceans that resulted in verification of the existence of Antarctica and brought back thousands of specimens that would later form the foundation of the Smithsonian Institution's collection. There are many attractions in South Florida that are related to coral. For example, this is a historic coral-cutting machine, located at Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park, that was used to cut coral blocks from the quarry in the background. The coral blocks were used for building materials in much of South Florida, the Keys and beyond.

Pictured is a fossilized coral head at Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park, Florida. Between talks, many of the coral reef scientists in attendance at the 2008 ICRS mingled, met new colleagues and talked shop.

Professor James Porter, Ph.D., University of Georgia, was generous enough to bring a large selection of his coral books to the Symposium for all to delight in. Here, Porter turns to something of interest in one of his books. Some of the books in his collection date back to the 16th century. Pictured is Fort Jefferson, its moat and the surrounding ocean. Visitors come to Dry Tortugas National Park to tour this incredible fort (more than 16 million bricks went into its construction) and to snorkel around the fort's moat walls in search of corals, various Florida reef fish as well as the many invertebrates that inhabit park waters.



This is one of the charter boats that bring visitors to Fort Jefferson and Dry Tortugas. The 70-mile trip out of Key West, Florida, takes a minimum of two and half hours and it's not cheap. But the incredible history, pristine ocean and isolation make the trek to Dry Tortugas unique and highly memorable. This archway gives a sense of the enormity of Fort Jefferson. While never attacked, the fort remained in Union hands throughout the Civil War and served as a prison both during and after the war. The most famous prisoner was Lincoln assassination co-conspirator Dr. Samuel Mudd.

One is never too far removed from marine life in Florida. These jacks are swimming around a dock in the Upper Keys. Buckets of bait fish and tourists more than willing to toss these feeders from the dock have "trained" the jacks and other fish to congregate in the area.