

Butterflyfish at Risk for Extinction

Coral reef degradation put Chevroned butterflyfish at risk for extinction.

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Chevroned butterflyfish are at risk for extinction as coral reefs continue to degrade due to pollution and climate change, a journal study found.

In the study, Dr. Morgan Pratchett and Dr. Michael Berumen of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution found butterflyfish eat only one type of coral – *Acropora hyacinthus*. The fish will disappear when it runs out, they said.

The team tested butterflyfish in tank trials on a range of different corals. The butterflyfish grew well when their favorite coral was available – but when it was removed and other types of corals were offered, the fish grew thin and some died.

The coral that butterflyfish feed on is vulnerable to attacks by starfish, storms and coral bleaching caused by the heating of ocean surface waters, which is thought to be linked to global warming.

A previous case in which a coral-dependent fish vanished occurred in the case of a *Gobiodon*, a specialized coral-dweller known only from one site, Kimbe Bay in Papua New Guinea. The fish was thought by scientists to have possibly become extinct after its habitat was destroyed.

Researchers said such extinctions are likely to occur as part of the global mass extinction of species now taking place, and that marine ecosystems may be particularly vulnerable because small changes in habitat or water quality can have a big impact on their species.

For more information, please visit <http://www.coralcoe.org.au/>