Life Under Water

Galaxy Corals

Corals classified under genus *Galaxea* have several common names—Galaxy coral, Octopus coral or Fluorescence coral. They are reef-building corals that are found in colonies and belong to the family Euphyllidae. They are common in a wide range of habitats across the Indo-Pacific region but dominantly recorded from inshore fringing reefs that are protected from strong wave action. Colonies may be small and cushion or dome shaped, or larger (exceeding 40 cm across) and spread thin or projecting from substrates. Coral colonies comprise polyps, each polyp being a tiny organism with a central mouth surrounded by tentacles, and having an exoskeleton (<10 millimeters in diameter in *Galaxea*). Galaxy coral polyps are green, grey, red or brown, with conspicuous white tipped tentacles. The colour comes from symbiotic microscopic algae (zooxanthellae) that reside within the polyp, and provide photosynthesised food in exchange for shelter. At present, coral reefs are extremely vulnerable to human-induced climate change, increased sedimentation, habitat destruction, overextraction of resources and the physical impacts of storm surges and cyclones.

The photo above of Galaxy Corals was taken in the shallow lagoons of Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep.

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