

Kerama-shoto Coral Reef

Coral Reef

Geographical Coordinates: 26°12'N, 127°16' E (Zamami Island region); 26°10'N, 127°20'E (Tokashiki Island region) / Altitude: 0m / Area: 353ha (Zamami Island region 233ha; Tokashiki Island region 120ha) / Major Type of Wetland: Coral reef / Designation: Marine Park Zone of Quasi-National Park / Municipalities Involved: Zamami Village and Tokashiki Village, Okinawa Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005 / Ramsar Criteria: 1, 3



The coast of Aharen in the western coast of Tokashiki Island



The sea of Zamami Island

General Overview:

The Kerama-shoto Islands consisting of a little more than 30 islands are situated 20-40km west of the Okinawa Island, the largest island in Okinawa Prefecture, the southernmost prefecture in Japan. Tokashiki Island, the largest of Kerama-shoto Islands, has an area of 1500ha.

The 353ha area of the Kerama-shoto Coral Reef designated as a Ramsar site covers 2 areas: 120ha along the west coast of Tokashiki Island, and 233ha around the uninhabited islands, Agenashiku, Gahi, and Ijakaja, nestled between Zamami Islands and Aka Island. Approximately 2000 people live in this area. This is one of the most beautiful natural seas in Japan.

The Coral Reef:

In the sea of the Kerama-shoto Coral Reef, high density of reef-building coral colonies are found in various shapes like tables, branches, antlers and blocks and 248 species of corals have been identified here. In particular, large populations of

Acropora corals in table or branch shapes are found along the western coast of Tokashiki Island. In some places here, up to 90% of the area is covered with corals.

Kerama-shoto Coral Reef supplies coral larvae to the surrounding waters. It is an important sea not only for its beauty but also for the scientific value. Coral reefs are diverse ecosystems like tropical forests with a variety of colorful fish typical to coral reefs such as damselfish and butterfly fish.

Eco-tourism:

With the clear water and warm climate along with the warm water with an average temperature exceeding 20 degrees C every month, Kerama-shoto Coral Reef is an ideal place for scuba diving and more than 100,000 divers visit here annually. However, the area was almost completely destroyed by Crown-of-thorns Starfish once. Local people have been engaged in an active eradication of the starfish to protect the coral reef. People can enjoy whale watching in winter as well.

[Reef-building Corals] Some of the coral species form coral reefs and some do not. Reef-building corals maintain symbiotic relationships with the algae Zooxanthellae that live in the coral polyp. The photosynthesis of these algae promotes the secretion of calcium carbonate by corals to build coral reefs. The common reef-building coral in genus *Acropora* develops into various shapes such as tables, branches and blocks.

A community of reef-building corals



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