

Kerama-shoto Coral Reef

Coral Reef

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



The Aharen coast of the western coastline of Tokashiki Island



The waters surrounding Zamami Island

Principal Features:

Japan is divided into 47 prefectures, of which the southernmost is Okinawa. The Kerama-shoto Islands constituting of approximately 30 islands are situated 20-40km west of the main Okinawa Island. Tokashiki Island, the largest in the Kerama-shoto, has an area of 1500ha.

The 353ha of the Kerama-shoto Coral Reef designated as a Ramsar site can be broken down into 2 major areas: 120ha along the west coast of Tokashiki Island, and 233ha among the deserted islands of Agenashiku, Gahi, and Ijakaja, nestled between the islands of Zamami and Aka. The human population within this area is approximately 2000 people. Much of this area remains in its natural state, making it a precious and beautiful coastal region in Japan.

The Coral Reef:

In the 2 areas that make up the Kerama-shoto Coral Reef, high density of reef-building coral such as table, branching, horny and blocky species can be found. At present, 248 species of corals have been confirmed. In particular,

large populations of *Acropora* corals in table and branching are found along Tokashiki Island. In some places here, up to 90% of the area is covered in coral.

Kerama-shoto Coral Reef supplies source of coral larvae for the surrounding waters, not only valued for its beauty, but is scientifically important as well. Similar to tropical rainforests, coral reef ecosystems display great species diversity. There are typical and diverse coral reef fishes, like damselfishes and butterfly fishes.

Eco-tourism:

The clarity and warm temperature of the water makes the Kerama-shoto Coral Reef ideal for scuba diving. Indeed, over 100,000 visitors come to dive here annually. In past time however, the area was plagued by crown-of thorns starfish, which nearly destroyed the coral reefs. Locals reacted quickly with conservation measures such as control campaigns that soon restored the reefs. During winter, whale watching is a popular activity.

[Reef-building Corals] Among corals, there are those species that form coral reefs and those that do not. Reef-building corals form symbiotic relationships with algae *Zooxanthellae*, which live inside the coral polyp. Through photosynthesis these algae provide corals with the nutrients necessary to secrete calcium carbonate, the building block of coral reefs. The common reef-building

Various reef-building corals



coral genus *Acropora* develops into many formations such as table, branching, and blocky shape corals.

Contact Information:

Zamami Village Office
<http://www.vill.zamami.okinawa.jp/>
Tokashiki Village Office
<http://www.vill.tokashiki.okinawa.jp/index.htm>

