

Name _____

Read the passages on pages 42 and 43. Then, answer the questions.

An Underwater Wilderness

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef system in the world. In fact, it's the only living system on Earth visible from space. Corals look like plants, but they are really animals. They have tube-shaped bodies with mouths on top. When corals die, their exoskeletons stay in place. Sand and small stones get washed between the skeletons. New coral grows on top of the old skeletons. The reef is built this way, layer by layer.

The Great Barrier Reef is not one reef. It is thousands of smaller reefs forming parts of a huge system. It is also made of hundreds of coral islands. The huge system stretches along the coast of Australia. It is more than 1,200 miles (1,931.21 km) long!

Between the reef and the beach is a lagoon. It is a great place for sea life because it is warm and quiet. Scuba divers love to dive there. There are more than 1,500 different kinds of fish living there, and more new species are discovered each year.

Divers also find many sizes of fish under the waves around the reef. Red dwarf gobies are less than one-half of an inch (1.27 cm) long. Whale sharks are the largest known living fish species and can grow to be more than 40 feet (12.19 m) long!

The reef is a great place for divers to explore because of the bright, colorful sea life. Divers might see one of the many shipwrecks. This part of the ocean is a hard place to sail because of its reefs, islands, and shallow water. Today, there are many lighthouses along the beaches to help ships steer clear of the dangers at the Great Barrier Reef.

1. How is the coral reef built?

2. Why is the lagoon a great place for sea life?

3. Why is the reef a great place for divers to explore?

Reflect

Compare and contrast "An Underwater Wilderness" and "Underwater Cities." What new information do you learn about coral reefs in "An Underwater Wilderness"?
