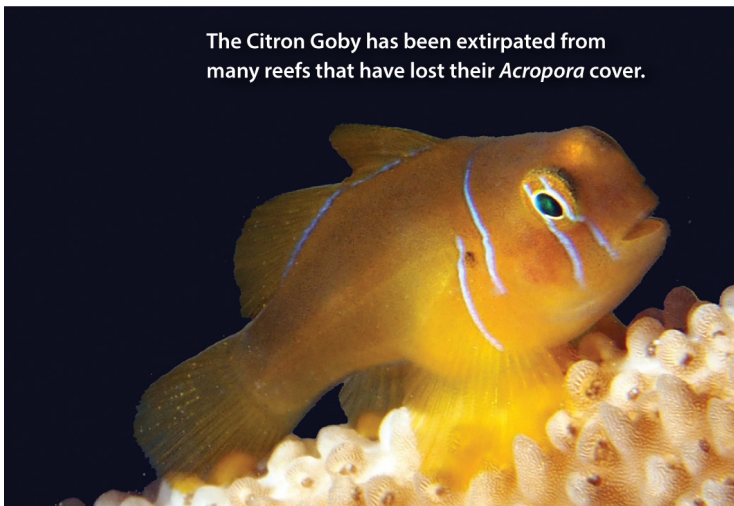


EDITOR'S PAGE

Fighting back with facts in a time of science denial

These are perilous times for those of us whose lives and passions are entwined with the natural world and the future of Earth's oceans and coral reefs. With new anti-science forces in Washington seemingly hell-bent on silencing environmental researchers, censoring climate experts, and muzzling the protectors of our clean air and clean water, even for a cockeyed optimist it is difficult not to foresee dark times ahead. Friends in Canada report that they have already lived through a period of years in which a political witch hunt sought to identify and repress climate scientists—and even to hide or destroy data concerning global warming. In the end, the forces of ignorance and evil were thrown

The Citron Goby has been extirpated from many reefs that have lost their *Acropora* cover.



out by the electorate, and the lesson learned, many now say, was never to let politicians stifle the voices of those who dedicate their lives to the search for truth.

Our best first defense, in fact, may be having the resolve to pay scrupulous attention to what is happening in the real world as a consequence of government gone haywire. To that end, we were especially interested in a report that arrived on our desk this week from the Maldivian Islands, sent by former NOAA coral scientist Andrew Bruckner, who is one of this magazine's correspondents on the front lines of global warming, coral bleaching, and the decline of reefs.

WHEN ACROPORA DIES...

For a taste of what happens when governments do nothing to quell greenhouse gas emissions, Bruckner and his colleague Georgia Howard of Coral Reef CPR are documenting the aftermath of a mass bleaching event that hit

some of the world's most beautiful reef-thronged atolls in the Maldives a year ago. We think the facts they present are powerful and worth your attention.

"The loss of *Acropora* is a catastrophic event for reefs, with both immediate and cascading future impacts that are especially bad news for reef fishes and the motile invertebrates that depend on healthy corals," say Bruckner and Howard. "Globally, there are around 130 species of fish that are corallivores, some of which only eat coral and others that consume coral tissue and other resources. About half of these are the charismatic, colorful butterflyfishes, but many other corallivores, including certain wrasse, triggerfish, and filefish families, compete for coral as an important food resource.

"There are fish species that only eat coral...and certain fishes, such as the Chevron Butterflyfish (*Chaetodon trifascialis*), are so specialized that they only eat a single coral species, *Acropora hyacinthus*. Since May 2016, we've witnessed lower numbers of butterflyfishes and the near complete disappearance of other fishes, such as the Coral Goby, from areas that lost all of their *Acropora*."

"DON'T WORRY, WE HAVE ALTERNATIVE FACTS"

CORAL Magazine is posting this story and a collection of amazing images from the Maldives online to allow free public access and a place to lodge comments. Please have a look and share it with a friend. In appointing climate deniers to all of the top positions in Washington, our current national leadership seems to be saying, "Don't worry, don't think about that, listen to our alternative facts."

As aquarists who care about the state of coral reefs, who understand that the incredible rewards and joy of marine aquarium keeping depends on their survival, we cannot stop thinking. How we make it through the coming years remains to be seen, but let us keep our respect for science and never let the real facts be censored.

—James Lawrence,
Shelburne, Vermont

RECOMMENDED READING

When Acropora Dies: Preventing the collapse of the coral canopy and loss of reef fishes through coral restoration in the aftermath of mass bleaching

Andrew Bruckner & Georgia Coward, Coral Reef CPR
<http://www.reef2rainforest.com/2017/02/21/when-acropora-dies/>