

Coral reefs are probably the most complex ecosystems on the planet, home to hundreds of thousands of species. The damage being caused to reefs by warming seas is one of the most serious effects of global warming.

Rising sea temperatures coupled with the strong El Nino of 1998 was devastating to much of the world's coral reefs. High water temperatures caused coral bleaching and subsequent death or adverse change to 16% of the world's coral reefs overall and up to 46% in parts of the Indian Ocean.

Above normal temperatures causes the coral to expel the microscopic symbionts and zooxanthellae that give them color. If this bleaching continues for days to weeks, the coral dies and algae takes over the reefs, changing the ecosystem. During another bout of bleaching in 2002, the international coral reef information network Reef Base reported 430 cases of coral bleaching, most of them on the Great Barrier Reef.

-Gabe

