

The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is a large living structure off the coast of Australia. In fact, it is so large that it is possible for it to be seen from space. It is home to perhaps one of the most diverse ranges of ocean wildlife in the world.

The Great Barrier Reef ecosystem is dependent on sunlight, and clear waters aid the growth of plants, plankton, and other organisms.

The Reef is full of shoals, or groups of fish, swimming around. Most shoals are made up of the same species, as a fish of a different color could stand out to predators. Fishes travel in shoals for protection from predators and increased safety. The bigger the group, the safer an individual is.

There are many types of coral in a coral reef. There is hard coral, there is soft coral, and there are coral impersonators too; called coral polyops, these jelly-like creatures disguise themselves to look like coral to protect themselves. Some specific types of coral include the Staghorn coral, which is a pointy coral known to grow extremely fast, and Brain coral, coral that looks like a human brain. Since coral is relatively fragile, they can be damaged in several ways, some of which include climate change, high intensity waves, and white syndrome disease.

A “bommie” is a coral structure that towers over the rest of the reef. The word comes from the aboriginal word for mountain. These structures provide homes to some fascinating creatures but are dangerous for boats. All marine plants live in the photic zone, or the zone where sunlight reaches, because they require light in order to photosynthesize. About 90% of marine life lives here.

Coral reefs are very diverse places. In fact, even though they make up less than 1% of ocean habitats, they are home to 25% of the world’s fish species. Predators can be broken down into apex predators and mesopredators. Apex predators like the barracuda are at the top of the food chain, while mesopredators eat other species but are eaten by apex predators. Some unique species of fish include Potato Cod (one of the largest types of fish), Remora, and Butterflyfish, which is smaller.