

Transplanted coral growing fast in lagoon off Okinawa coast

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Baby coral transplanted in the Sekisei coral-reef lagoon in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture under a coral-reef regeneration program are growing steadily, according to the Environment Ministry and the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology.

The Sekisei Lagoon, which extends between the Ishigakijima and Iriomotejima islands, is located about 450 kilometers west of the prefecture's main island and is the country's largest coral reef.

The lagoon area also includes the smaller islands of Taketomijima and Kuroshima.

Researchers working on the joint project first implant fertilized coral eggs into ceramic beds. Once the eggs have grown into larvae 1 centimeter to 2 centimeters in diameter, they remove the ceramic beds and attach them to rocks in the seabed.

Since the project began in fiscal year 2004, about 7,500 baby coral have been transplanted. In some areas, scientists have found staghorn coral of about 10 centimeters in height where they planted baby coral last year.

Recent mass generation of Acanthaster starfish and coral bleaching in the area have caused catastrophic damage to the Sekisei Lagoon. Because of the damage, the reef has diminished to about 20 percent of its largest recorded size.

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