

Smithsonian reports fiery-red coral species discovered in the Peruvian Pacific

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A new coral species, *Psammogorgia hookeri*, has been collected by scuba divers from rocky ledges at depths to 25 meters in Peru's Paracas National Reserve. The corals' hand-sized colonies are slightly smaller

than the colonies of their closest relative. Costa Rican researchers at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and the University of Costa Rica have named the coral for Yuri Hooker, biologist and naturalist at the Cayetano Heredia Peruvian University in Lima, Peru. Researchers also found bits of coral attached to mussels from Independence Bay at a local fish market.

"This new [species](#) may be found nowhere else in the world," said Hector Guzman, marine biologist at STRI. "But [coral reefs](#) and [coral](#) communities in Peru have never been systematically studied. We expect more surprises as we look at new collections."

Odalisca Breedy, lead author of the new species report in the *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the UK*, and Guzmán are experts in soft coral taxonomy and ecology. To date, they have discovered nearly 25 new species of soft coral in the Pacific. This new species was identified based on colony characteristics and examinations of the coral using both light and scanning-electron microscopy. Breedy and Guzman compared the new samples with specimens at Peru's Ocean Institute, IMARPE and at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. Most of the museum specimens were more than 90 years old because no one has collected in this area in recent times.

"With logistical support from the Peruvian National Protected Areas Service, we're beginning to discover the amazing biodiversity of corals and marine invertebrates in the Peruvian Pacific," said Hooker. "It's mostly a matter of looking in the right places and inviting experts who can identify these relatively unknown and unstudied creatures."



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This [new species](#) underscores the importance of Peru's still largely unexplored marine protected areas.

More information: Breedy, O. and Guzmán, H.M. 2014. A new species of alcyonacean octocoral from the Peruvian zoogeographic region. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the UK*. [DOI: 10.1017/S0025315413001835](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025315413001835)

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