

The Lallie Didham Coral and Shell Collection, at CORDIO East Africa

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The scleractinian coral fauna of the East African mainland coast has had little formal systematic study. H.J. Hamilton, at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s completed a Masters degree focusing on the coral fauna of Dar es Salaam and nearby areas of Tanzania and Kenya (Hamilton 1975, Hamilton and Brakel 1984). Since then, field surveys for coral diversity have been conducted at many sites but until high quality *in situ* identification resources with global coverage were released after the turn of this century (Veron 2000, Wallace 2001), species identification was severely hampered. In a regional compilation, Sheppard (2002) reported from the literature coral species numbers of 112 for Kenya and Tanzania combined, compared to recorded numbers of 270+ and predicted numbers over 300 (see Obura, 2007). As a result of this under-representation, the East African coast has featured as a lower-diversity subregion within the overall Indo-Pacific province (Veron 2000).

At present coral collections are held at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Faculty of Aquatic Science and Technology, and in the National Museums of Kenya, in Nairobi. The Lallie Didham coral and shell collection will add a further reference collection to be based in Mombasa, Kenya, to improve training in coral taxonomy and identification, and as a reference for the updated diversity of corals in the region.

Lallie Didham was born in 1929 in London,

England, and moved to East Africa in 1952. Living in Malindi since 1960 adjacent to Casuarina Point, she was instrumental in helping the then Wildlife Conservation and Management Department in selecting the Malindi and Watamu reefs as Africa's first Marine Protected Areas, gazetted in 1968. Following that, Lallie was appointed an Honorary Warden, and maintained her support to the Malindi Warden throughout her life. Living by the reefs in Malindi, Lallie developed a passion for snorkeling and diving, which she pursued actively until 2002 with dive trips up and down the Kenya coast, and across the globe. With this passion came an interest in corals and shells, which she started to collect in the 1960s, recognizing the value of keeping voucher specimens, especially of rare and unusual species from limited localities. Lallie's collecting contributed to many leading collections around the world, and she passed specimens to the collections of the Museum of Natural History (London), Museum of Tropical Queensland (Australia) and the Australian Institute of Marine Science, among others, to the leading coral taxonomists in the world.

With her sad passing in 2001, Lallie's coral and shell collection has been loaned by her family under the care of CORDIO East Africa, to be curated and displayed for education and research. The coral collection was sorted and catalogued at CORDIO by Rose Machuku from Moi University, and Laurence Defrise, from Belgium. The collection numbers some

Obura, D.O., Tamelander, J., & Linden, O. (Eds) (2008). Ten years after bleaching - facing the consequences of climate change in the Indian Ocean. CORDIO Status Report 2008. Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean/Sida-SAREC. Mombasa. <http://www.cordioea.org>



Photo 1: Lallie Didham, at home in Malindi (right) and out snorkeling with KWS Warden Janet Kaleha and coxswain Heri (above left).

Table 1. Family composition of the Lallie Didham coral collection.

Family	Specimens
Acroporidae	69
Agariciidae	54
Caryophyllidae	1
Dendrophyllidae	48
Euphyllidae	12
Faviidae	144
Fungiidae	140
Helioporidae	4
Meandrinidae	3
Merulinidae	27
Milleporidae	5
Mussidae	28
Oculinidae	12
Pectiniidae	38
Pocilloporidae	36
Poritidae	49
Siderastreidae	47
Trachyphyllidae	12
Tubiporidae	1
Grand Total	730



Figure 1. Part of the Lallie Didham coral collection, on display at CORDIO East Africa, Mombasa.

730 specimens in 19 families and 64 genera. Cataloguing of specimens to the species level is in progress. The geographic range of specimens is not fully documented, but is known to extend along the whole coast of Kenya, with a small number of specimens likely from northern Tanzania. The shell collection has been grouped by family and photographed, and a malacologist will be sought to conduct further work on it.

In the long term CORDIO will seek a partnership with the National Museums of Kenya and Kenya Wildlife Service for the collection to form the heart of the national reference collections for corals and shells. In this capacity it will be open to the public for viewing, and to Kenyan students to teach them about corals and coral reefs, and train new generations of biologists and taxonomists.

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