

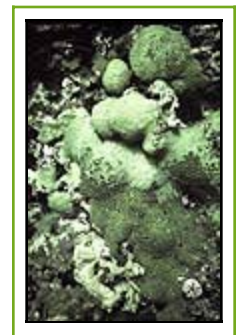
In The Spotlight: Ecologist, Ronald Karlson, Ph.D.

August 2000 -- [Ron Karlson](#) is an internationally recognized expert in the field of coral community ecology. While corals may appear to the untrained eye to be dormant structures, more geological than biological, Ron's research since the early 1970's has shown these colonial organisms to engage in dynamic interactions as they respond to predation, intra- and interspecies competition for resources, meteorological phenomena, etc. Dr. Karlson's research experience includes studies of coral reefs in Jamaica (1972-84) and on the Great Barrier Reef, Australia (1986, 1992-93, 1998). Among Ron's recent accomplishments is the publication of a book on coral ecology, [Dynamics of Coral Communities](#) (1999, Kluwer Academic Publishers).



Ron currently is participating in an exciting series of studies of coral communities in the South Pacific. He summarized this experience as follows:

"In 1999, I had the unique opportunity to visit the reefs of American Samoa and the Solomon Islands. This experience was part of a collaborative multi-year project involving myself, Dr. Howard Cornell here at the University of Delaware, and a group of Australian scientists led by [Dr. Terry Hughes](#) of James Cook University. We have targeted Pacific reefs across the world's largest coral diversity gradient from French Polynesia to Indonesia. Our objective is to determine how local coral communities vary in terms of species composition, relative abundance patterns, and numbers of species along this gradient. This effort will contribute to our general understanding of coral community structure and function. Such an understanding is essential if we are to preserve coral reefs in the face of current assaults associated with overfishing, eutrophication, diseases, sedimentation and other anthropogenic disturbances.



"Travel to such remote locations has its rewards. Uepi Island in the Solomon Islands offered some of the best diving I've seen in many years. It didn't even bother me that our dive gear and luggage were temporarily lost somewhere between Los Angeles and Honiara! Rental gear was available on Uepi and the inexpensive clothing we bought on very short notice in Honiara worked just fine. Likewise, our stay in American Samoa was delightful. Tito and Marge at Vaoto Lodge on Ofu were wonderful hosts as was Barry at Leone on Tutuila. Best of all, were our Australian mates. Their expertise in the field and logistical planning were worldclass. For those interested in travel to this part of the world, the Lonely Planet guides and David Stanley's South Pacific Handbook are very helpful."

