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## The Role of Environment and Microorganisms in Diseases of Corals



*Bleached Montastraea faveolata in colonies in Turrumote reef, south west coast of Puerto Rico during the bleaching event of 2005. Reefs took on the appearance of snow covered peaks for several months during which white plague and yellow band epizootics compounded bleaching-related tissue mortality, resulting in significant losses of live coral cover.*

*Photo: Ernesto Weil*

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*Over the last several decades, diseases have become increasingly important in the decline of coral reefs, yet the study of coral diseases is still nascent. Most disease conditions are not well characterized, the causative microbial agents are known for only a few, and we are only beginning to comprehend the role of environmental factors in disease emergence and impact.*

*In 2006, DAO published its first special issue on coral diseases, based on the state of the art at that time. There have been many advances in the understanding of coral disease since then, and this is reflected in the current publication.*

*This DAO Special contains papers based on presentations made at the 11th International Coral*

*Reef Symposium (2008, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA). The contributing authors provide an update on coral disease research, including new advances in the microbiology of causative agents, epidemiological modelling studies, and the role of climate as a driver of disease. They also consider management needs in light of a rapidly changing environment of coral diseases.*

*Although there is still much to learn, we hope and intend that this DAO Special be a useful source of information to researchers, fishery and tourism managers, and all who have an interest in maintaining the health of coral reefs worldwide.*

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