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A comparison of the population ecology  
of reef flat corals  
of the family  
Faviidae (Goniastrea, Platygyra).

Thesis submitted by  
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in May 1986

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
the Department of Marine Biology at  
James Cook University of North Queensland

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## DECLARATION

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R. C. Babcock

26 May 1986

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		1
Chapter 1	Introduction	2
Chapter 2	Distribution	5
2.1	Introduction	5
2.2	Methods	7
	2.2.1	7
	2.2.2	9
2.3	Results	9
	2.3.1	9
	2.3.2	17
2.4	Discussion	19
Chapter 3	Growth Rates	22
3.1	Introduction	22
3.2	Methods	23
	3.2.1	23
	3.2.2	23
	3.3.3	24
3.3	Results	25
	3.3.1	25
	3.3.2	27
	3.3.3	28
3.4	Discussion	32
Chapter 4	Reproduction	39
4.1	Introduction	39
4.2	Methods	40
	4.2.1	40
	4.2.2	40
	4.2.3	41
	4.2.4	43

4.3	Results		44
		4.3.1	gametogenic cycles 44
		4.3.2	size specific fecundity 48
		4.3.3	spawning observations 58
		4.3.4	larval development 63
		4.3.5	larval settlement 66
4.4	Discussion		66
		4.4.1	gametogenic cycles 66
		4.4.2	size specific fecundity 69
		4.4.3	spawning observations 71
		4.4.4	larval development and behaviour 79
Chapter 5	Population dynamics		83
5.1	Introduction		83
5.2	Methods		84
		5.2.1	annual population surveys 84
		5.2.2	juvenile mortality 86
5.3	Results	5.3.1	size-frequency distributions 87
		5.3.2	population dynamics 95
		5.3.3	age frequency distribution 107
		5.3.4	juvenile mortality 112
5.4	Discussion		114
Chapter 6	Life Tables		124
6.1	Introduction		124
6.2	Age determination and age distribution		125
6.3	Age- specific fecundity schedules		125
6.4	Rate of increase		127
6.5	Mortality and survivorship		127
6.6	Life tables		128
6.4	Discussion		140
References			146
Appendix 1			157

## Figures

2.1 Map of study sites	8
2.2 Cross reef distribution, Geoffrey Bay	10
2.3 Cross reef distribution, Pioneer Bay	11
2.4 Sedimentation at Geoffrey and Pioneer Bays	18
3.1 Juvenile growth rates	31
3.2 Size - age relationships; <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u> .	38
4.1 Gametogenic cycles; <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u> .	46
4.2 Annual temperature cycles	47
4.3 Size - fecundity relationships, Geoffrey Bay	49
4.4 Size - fecundity relationships, Pioneer Bay	50
4.5 Spawning records, 1981 - 1985	60
4.6 Hour of spawning, 1982 - 1984	62
4.7 Early embryonic stages	65
4.8 Embryonic and larval stages	67
4.9 Spawning and tidal cycles	77
5.1 Size-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, Geoffrey Bay	88
5.2 Size-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, Pioneer Bay	89
5.3 Size-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, pooled bays	90
5.4 Age-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, Geoffrey Bay	91
5.5 Age-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, Pioneer Bay	92
5.6 Age-frequency distributions and total cover of populations, pooled bays	93
5.7 Size-frequency distributions as a function of their size in the previous year, <u>G. aspera</u>	97
5.8 Size-frequency distributions as a function of their size in the previous year, <u>G. favulus</u>	98
5.9 Size-frequency distributions as a function of their size in the previous year, <u>P. sinensis</u>	99
5.10 Age and size of <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> , and <u>P. sinensis</u> at Geoffrey Bay	109
5.11 Age and size of <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u> at Pioneer Bay	110

5.12 Age specific mortality of <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u>	111
5.13 Juvenile mortality, <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u>	113
5.14 Juvenile mortality, composite graph for <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u>	113
5.15 Typical colonies of <u>G. aspera</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u>	116
5.16 Reef flats of Geoffrey Bay and Pioneer Bay	117
6.1 Survivorship of <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u> from horizontal life tables	136
6.2 Survivorship of <u>G. aspera</u> , <u>G. favulus</u> and <u>P. sinensis</u> from vertical life tables	137
6.3 Age specific fecundity rates	139

## ABSTRACT

The spatial distribution, abundance and growth rates of Goniastrea aspera, G. favulus and Platygyra sinensis were studied at two fringing reefs in the central Great Barrier Reef region. All three species exhibited similar degrees of spatial aggregation, despite the reproductive behaviour of G. favulus which was the only one of the species to spawn eggs with benthic development. Growth rates and recruitment rates in G. aspera and G. favulus were positively related to abundances at the two sites. Growth rates of both adults and juveniles were also used to estimate colony ages.

Gametogenic cycles and size specific fecundities were determined for each species at both sites. Goniastrea aspera, G. favulus and P. sinensis were among a large number of species studied which were observed to participate in annual mass spawning events. These mass spawnings are predictable and take place on only a few nights a year, after full moons in October and November. Studies of development subsequent to spawning showed that larvae did not become mobile for at least 36 hours, and the first larvae were capable of settling only after 4 to 5 days. Frequency distributions and rates of mortality based on both size and age were studied in marked quadrats at the two sites.

Frequency distributions based on size differed in some respects from those based on age, particularly with respect to the older age classes which decreased in mean size in many populations. Mortality patterns showed greater similarities between the two methods, however differences were again apparent in the older/larger classes since partial mortality to individuals is not accounted for in age based measurements. Finally, life tables were generated for each species. The life history patterns of G. aspera, G. favulus and P. sinensis appear to demonstrate a number of trade-offs that can be made between traits such as egg size, egg number, larval mortality, age at first reproduction, and mean colony age and generation times.