



CORAL HOUSEKEEPERS



NOAA
CORAL REEF
CONSERVATION PROGRAM

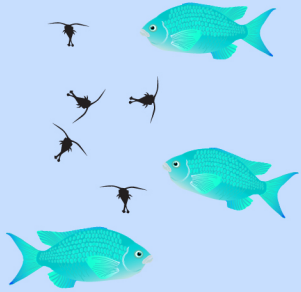
In the Atlantic and Caribbean, fish need healthy coral reefs and coral reefs need healthy fish populations.

Managed fishery species rely on reef systems for food and shelter.

In the same way people care for their homes, fish maintain coral reef ecosystems.

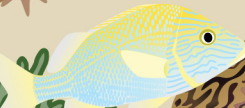
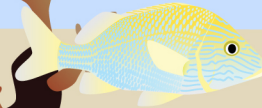
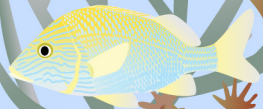
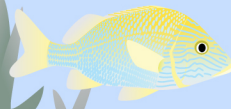
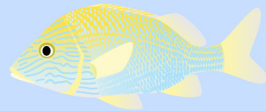
Fertilization/Nutrients

All fish within a coral reef assist with nutrient cycling. Grunts, damselfish, and other foragers that eat away from the reef excrete new nutrients into the reef system when they return. The extra nutrients enhance coral growth, similar to how people fertilize gardens to help them grow.



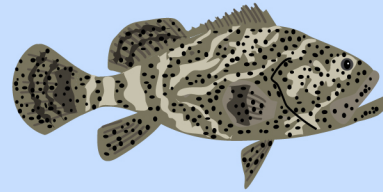
Cleaning/Herbivores

Algae compete with corals for space. They grow rapidly to crowd out or smother coral neighbors. Herbivores, like parrotfish and surgeonfish, clean coral reefs like housekeepers by eating algae. This creates space for corals to settle and grow.



Pest control/Corallivores

Unchecked populations of corallivores, such as the bearded fireworm, are harmful to coral reefs. They eat corals, spread disease, and degrade reef structure. Grunts, triggerfish, and wrasse act like exterminators by eating coral pests to control their populations.



Shelter/Reef structure

A healthy reef is home to many species of coral that build and maintain the reef structure. Corals provide places for small fish to hide and attract big fish searching for food. In the same way that a high-rise apartment building in a bustling city can house many families, a large, healthy reef supports a diverse and abundant fish community.

