

For immediate release

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Project Coral ‘babies’ to help restore Florida reefs

The Horniman Museum and Gardens’ pioneering coral reproduction work, Project Coral (as seen on BBC One’s [Blue Planet UK, yesterday](#)), has this week taken a step closer to having real-world benefit for coral reef conservation, thanks to international partner The Florida Aquarium.

Staff at The Florida Aquarium’s state-of-the-art coral conservation nursery in Apollo Beach, Florida have set up new tanks – using Project Coral’s techniques and processes – which from this week will be home to corals from the Florida Reef Tract. The corals will be kept in conditions identical to the wild reef using the husbandry protocols pioneered at the Horniman in South London, until they spawn in August in time with the wild spawning.

The Florida Aquarium’s researchers will then cross-fertilise the corals to create new ‘recruits’ or baby corals, replicating the achievement of Jamie Craggs’s team at the Horniman in 2015. The new corals will be reared in the conservation nursery until they are big enough to have a good chance of survival in the wild. They’ll then be added to the wild reef to aid in its restoration.

Three coral species are part of The Florida Aquarium’s project – Pillar Coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*); Staghorn Coral (*Acropora cervicornis*) and Maze Coral (*Meandrina meandrites*) – two of which (Pillar and Maze Corals) have been severely affected by the current disease outbreak on the Florida reef.

Keri O’Neil, The Florida Aquarium’s Coral Nursery Manager, says: ‘The coral conservation team have been working hard to finish the final set-up of our Project Coral laboratory spawning aquariums, and programming all of the sunrise, sunset, moonrise, moonset, spectral and temperature information into our controllers. Now that the systems are running well, we’re excited to see them populated with corals, ready for spawning this summer. This project is a "head start" program for coral – we will raise the juvenile corals long enough to give them a better chance of survival than they would have had as larvae in the ocean. For some fast-growing species, this could be as little as eight months before they are ready to be rehomed on the wild reef.’

Jamie Craggs, Aquarium Curator at the Horniman Museum Gardens and lead researcher for Project Coral, says: ‘Thanks to The Florida Aquarium, we’re now at the point where our work will begin to make a tangible difference to coral reef restoration, and it’s incredibly exciting that Project Coral ‘babies’ will be added to Florida’s wild reefs in 2020.’

Ends

Pictured: The Florida Aquarium's newly populated Project Coral tank, with Pillar Coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*). Credit: The Florida Aquarium.

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Notes to Editors:

- **Project Coral** is an innovative coral reproductive research project led by the Horniman Aquarium with international partners. The Horniman Aquarium has been pioneering research into developing techniques to stimulate coral sexual reproduction, and became the first institution globally to successfully induce predictable broadcast coral spawning as well as the first successful in-vitro fertilisation of captive corals in the UK. Project Coral's breakthrough of controlled captive coral spawning will support coral research facilities all over the world, by opening up opportunities to examine the effects of climate change, aid restoration of the reefs and support sustainable livelihoods. Support Project Coral at horniman.ac.uk/projectcoral
- **The Florida Aquarium** is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization whose mission is to entertain, educate and inspire stewardship about our natural environment. The Florida Aquarium is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA). flaquarium.org
- **EcoTech Marine** have supported the set-up of Project Coral tanks in London and Florida by providing the LEDs to light the research tanks. ecotechmarine.com
- **Triton Applied Reef Bioscience** have supported Project Coral at the Horniman by providing water chemistry analysis and reagents to run the system. triton.de/en
- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** opened in 1901 as a gift to the people in perpetuity from tea trader and philanthropist Frederick John Horniman, to 'bring the world to Forest Hill'. Today the Horniman has a collection of 350,000 objects, specimens and artefacts from around the world. Its galleries include natural history, music and an acclaimed aquarium. A new World Gallery of anthropology opened in June 2018 and a new arts space, The Studio, opened in October 2018. Indoor exhibits link to the award-winning display gardens – from medicinal and dye gardens to an interactive sound garden, Butterfly House and an animal walk – set among 16 acres of beautiful, green space offering spectacular views across London. horniman.ac.uk
- The Horniman Museum and Gardens is core-funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and since 1990 has been governed by an independent charitable trust, registered charity no. 802725. The Horniman Museum and Gardens also receives funding from Arts Council England as one of its National Portfolio Organisations.
- **Opening times and admission.** The Horniman Museum is open daily 10am-5.30pm, except 24 - 26 December, when it is closed. The Gardens open at 7.15am Monday to Saturday and 8am on Sunday and Bank Holidays, and close at sunset. Entry to the Museum and Gardens is free but charges apply for the Aquarium, Butterfly House and some special exhibitions and events. Horniman Members and Benefactors go free – horniman.ac.uk/members.
- **Access.** The Museum and the Gardens are both wheelchair and pushchair friendly with accessible toilets. Limited on-site parking is available for Blue Badge holders. horniman.ac.uk/visit/disability-and-access.
- **Travel.** The Horniman is situated at 100 London Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 3PQ on the South Circular Road (A205). It can be reached easily by train to Forest Hill station (London Overground/Southern, travel time approx. 15-20 minutes from east/central London or East Croydon) and by local buses (176, 185, 197, 356, P4).