

KERALA

Coral bleaching reported from Enayam

THE  HINDU



T.Nandakumar

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM APRIL 06, 2017 00:00 IST

UPDATED: APRIL 06, 2017 04:19 IST

Snowflake coral, an alien invasive species, has been found in the area

An underwater survey by the Friends of Marine Life, a local NGO, has revealed bleaching of corals off the coast of Enayam in Kanyakumari district, confirming warnings from the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that warming waters in the tropical Pacific and Indian oceans would lead to widespread coral bleaching across the world this year.

Freedivers working for FML have recorded discoloration due to heavy bleaching of hard corals in the Enayam area. Several types of corals were also found to be disease-ridden. Last month, NOAA had warned that heat stress and warming ocean waters had triggered the longest, most widespread and most damaging coral bleaching event on record at the global level.

“Coral colonies are rarely found in deep waters with heavy currents. The Enayam coast, just 20 km south of Thiruvananthapuram is an exception,” says independent researcher Robert Panipilla who coordinated the project for the FML.

Survey conducted

The survey conducted as part of an underwater biodiversity assessment revealed the presence of 14 varieties of hard corals known as Cnidarians, three types of soft corals and five varieties of Zoanthidae, apart from black corals, Hydrozoa and Gorgonian sea fans.

The species have been documented and the data are to be published on the FML website soon. “For centuries, the freediving community at Enayam has been closely observing and conserving the marine biodiversity in the region. The study was taken up in response to their request to document the rich biodiversity,” Mr. Robert said.

Last year, scuba divers working for the FML at Kovalam and Enayam had come across Snowflake Coral (*Carijoa riisei*), an alien invasive species with the potential to wreak havoc on the marine ecology. Several colonies of the fast growing species had been reported from barnacle clusters on the rocky reefs in both locations.

“Despite the warning, marine research institutions in the country have done nothing to address the threat,” says Mr. Robert. FML, he said, would take the initiative for documentation, protection and conservation of marine biodiversity in the region with the help of local communities.