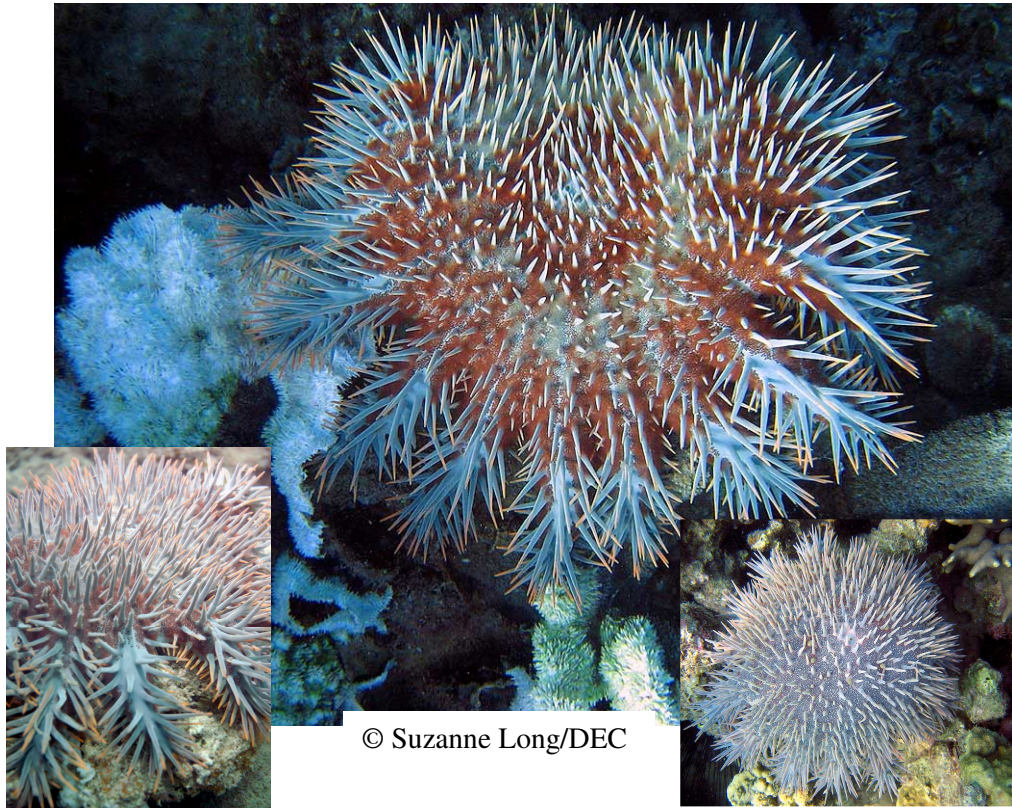


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MARINE BIOTA OF THE MONTH - SEPTEMBER 2007



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Acanthaster planci

This spiny predator is known as the crown-of-thorns starfish and can be found on coral reefs in the Red Sea and Indo-Pacific oceans. This starfish has thorn-like spines all over its body for protection, has 12 to 19 arms which can be regenerated if injured and can grow as large as a car tyre.

A. planci are corallivores that feed on coral polyps in the darkness of night. Crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) feed by everting their stomach through their mouth and spreading it over the coral surface using its tube feet. The starfish releases digestive enzymes which break down the tissues of the corals so it can absorb the liquefied tissue. This resilient species can survive on their own energy reserves for over six months, when there is little or no food available.

Outbreaks of this species have occurred around the world including the well known Great Barrier Reef. Crown-of-thorns starfish can have a devastating impact on coral reefs, with an individual consuming up to six square meters of living reef per year. This species, however, is a natural predator of coral reefs and part of a healthy ecosystem. Crown-of-thorns starfish have been observed in the tropical waters of northern Western Australia including the Montebello/Barrow Islands Marine Conservation Reserves, as pictured above.