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Newly-Discovered Amazon Reef in Danger

Last year, researchers made an announcement that was billed as one of the most significant discoveries in marine science in decades: there is a massive reef stretching over six hundred miles long under the plume of the Amazon River. On January 24th, we left the city of Santana, Amapá, with a team of Brazilian scientists and sailed out of the Amazon mouth aboard the Greenpeace ship Esperanza to explore the reef for the first time.

There was real urgency to our mission, as BP, Total, and a Brazilian company planned to begin drilling for oil in the area. Very little is known about the area, yet decisions were being made that could put this newly-discovered biome at risk before anyone even knew what it looked like. Our plan was to show the people of Brazil what was at stake, in hopes that enough of them would want to protect the Amazon Reef and that the oil companies would need to back down.

We had a great tool with us, a two-person submarine called DeepWorker that would enable us to gather images of the reef hundreds of feet below the surface. Of course, this wasn't going to be easy, and there were a lot of unknowns. Would the current be too strong for the sub to operate? Would the water be too murky to see anything? Would the seas be too rough for us to dive at all?

Our first problem showed up before



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we even arrived at the reef, 100 miles offshore. The Brazilian Navy informed us that we had no authority to dive. Fortunately, they backed down pretty quickly, and we were ready to begin. I was one of two sub pilots on board, and brought Dr. Ronaldo Francini-Filho, a renowned coral reef ecologist from São Paulo for the historic first ever dive on the Amazon Reef. We touched down on a sandy bottom at about 675 feet, and gradually moved up slope. We passed over a really strange mound covered in yellow sponges, and a ledge that had been formed 18,000 years ago when it was on the coast and sea level was lower.

As we reached 492 feet, we entered the mesophotic zone, where enough sunlight reaches from the surface to allow plants to survive. Here we started to see lots of mint-green corals and dense fields of

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Leave a Lasting Legacy



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Newly-Discovered Amazon Reef in Danger (cont.)

sponges. Incredibly, we saw thousands and thousands of soft corals, providing habitat for countless juvenile fish. At a depth of 260 feet, we watched surgeonfish line up to have their parasites removed by wrasses at a cleaning station — perhaps the deepest ever recorded. Two of the butterfly fish we documented appear to be new species.

By the time we made it back to the ship, it was clear the Amazon Reef is no place to drill for oil. It is unique and full of life, and should not be for sale to oil companies.

For the next two weeks, we continued to explore the reef, making new discoveries and capturing spectacular images. We also confirmed what scientists had predicted — that this is not a true coral reef, but a rhodolith reef that has corals living on it. As Dr. Fabiano Thompson

explained, rhodoliths are little understood even by most marine biologists. Picture huge plains of pink, tennis-ball-sized “stones,” which are actually miniature worlds full of tiny invertebrates, algae, bacteria and larval organisms. They are found in such huge numbers that they eventually form massive reefs, so large that they may play important roles in our planet’s carbon cycle. Over thousands of years, they can form colossal structures like the Amazon Reef.

We arrived back in the Brazilian port city of Belem on February 10th, wrapping up 2 ½ weeks exploring the Amazon Reef, to find that the expedition had definitely struck a nerve. Oil companies are reportedly conceding that they will need to remove several sites from consideration, and that the drilling they had planned to start this spring will be delayed until at least next year.

For Greenpeace, this was a fantastic start to the campaign. For me, I will never forget the team on board the Esperanza, nor the experience exploring a new world for the first time. Now it is up to all of us to keep the momentum going and make sure that the Amazon Reef is permanently safe from offshore drilling.

The struggle to save our planet will continue long after we are gone, but that doesn’t mean that our voices become silent. By leaving a legacy to Greenpeace Fund, you can continue to be an advocate for the planet that future generations will inherit.

If you wish to name Greenpeace in your will, retirement plan, life insurance or other estate planning document, you will need a few simple facts about us:

Bequest Information

Legal Status: Greenpeace Fund, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization

Legal Name and Address: Greenpeace Fund, Inc.
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Federal Tax ID: 95-3313195

Please contact Corrine Barr at 1-800-328-0678 or corrine.barr@greenpeace.org if you would like to know more about how you can remember Greenpeace in your estate plans.

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If you are 70 ½ or older it is now possible to make charitable gifts directly from your IRA to Greenpeace Fund free from federal income taxation. And make tax-free gifts of all or a portion of your mandatory IRA withdrawals up to \$100,000 per year.

The Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act, passed in December 2015, allows taxpayers age 70 ½ or older to transfer up to \$100,000 annually from their IRA accounts directly to qualified charities, but not donor-advised funds, supporting organizations, or private foundations, without first having to recognize the distribution as income.

Distributions must be made directly from the IRA trustee payable to the public charity. In order to qualify, donations should be directed to Greenpeace Fund - the 501(c) 3 public charity arm of Greenpeace in the US. The tax identification number for Greenpeace Fund is 95-3313195.

Please contact Corrine Barr at 1-800-328-0678 or corrine.barr@greenpeace.org for more information or if you have questions about how to make a transfer from your IRA and help Greenpeace be your voice for the Earth.

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White urchins, like these in the Amazon Reef, often use fragments of other organisms to hide and to defend themselves from predators.

For more on this story
on the Amazon reef, visit:
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