

Identifying creatures from the deep!

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Dr Tabitha Pearman, project lead of the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) project, has been identifying specimens of cold-water corals and other VME indicator taxa, collected in January 2021 during a collaborative research cruise with The Falkland Islands Fisheries Department and Consolidated Fisheries Limited.

The ability to collect deep-sea specimens represented an exciting opportunity for SAERI as historically few studies have been undertaken in the South-West Atlantic deep-sea. However, the lack of identification keys and records for the area made identifying the animals more challenging! Luckily, the novelty of sampling these environments means that there are many experts willing to help identify the cold-water corals, and Dr Stephen Cairns, and Dr Michelle Taylor have both assisted in identifying coral species.

Cold-water corals are identified based on a combination of overall morphology (i.e. if animals are colonial or solitary and branching pattern) and by looking at microscopic features such as the shape and arrangement of the polyps and sclerites (scales covering some corals).

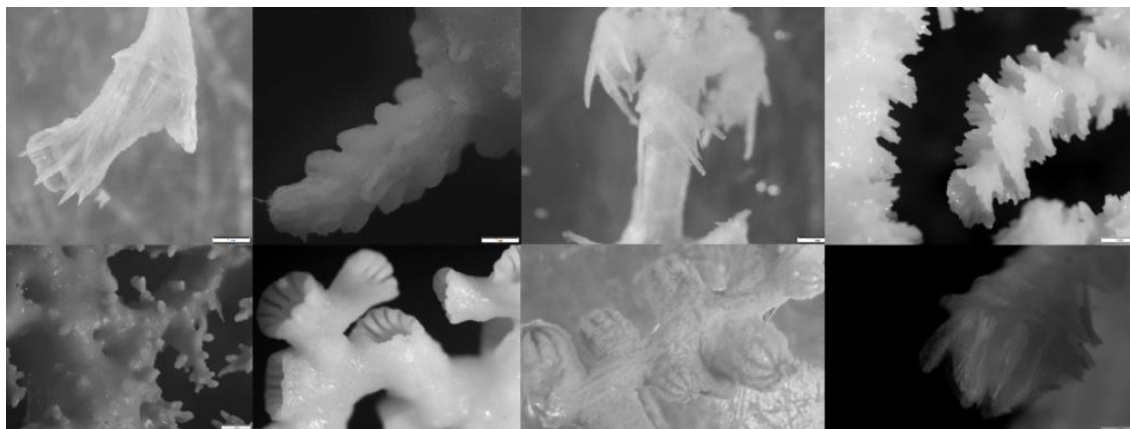
The specimens collected will assist in the annotation of images collected by deep-sea cameras and form the basis of a database from which predictive habitat maps can be built.

SAERI NEWS



From the field to the lab – the journey of the specimen.

Specimens were collected from bycatch samples and details of the date, location and depth of sampling recorded in the field to assist with identification back in the lab. Specimens are identified using taxonomic keys based on microscopic features.



Examples of cold-water corals under the microscope.

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