

For immediate release
Issued 9 October 2024



Threatened Pink Sea Fan coral breeds in UK aquarium for first time

A threatened species of UK coral has been bred for the first time in a UK aquarium, at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in south London.

New photographs capture the landmark lab-based reproduction of Pink Sea Fan, *Eunicella verrucosa*, the first time the native temperate coral species has been successfully reproduced in a UK institution.

Pink Sea Fans are found in coastal waters from western Ireland and southwest Britain to the coasts of West Africa and the Mediterranean. They are under threat in the UK and classified as vulnerable worldwide on the Red List of Threatened Species, published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The Pink Sea Fans – collected from a wreck off the coast of Teignmouth, south Devon by a team from the University of Exeter – are cared for in the Horniman Aquarium’s [Project Coral](#) lab, home to its pioneering coral reproduction research. The spawning is part of University of Exeter PhD student Kaila Wheatley Kornblum’s research into the reproduction, larval dispersal and population connectivity of *Eunicella verrucosa*. Supervising her PhD are Prof Jamie Stevens (University of Exeter) and Dr Jamie Craggs, Principal Aquarium Curator at the Horniman and lead scientist on Project Coral.

Dr Jamie Craggs, Principal Aquarium Curator at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, says: ‘This marks the first time this species has been spawned and reared in the UK and is a major step forward in conserving the species. It’s wonderful to see the larvae now starting to settle and grow into juvenile sea fans. The success of the spawning is thanks to the exceptional husbandry skills of the Horniman Aquarium team, who are working behind the scenes of our popular aquarium on a number of exciting coral research partnerships.’

Pink Sea Fans are believed to have been successfully bred by only one other institution, Lisbon Oceanarium in 2023.

More

Kaila Wheatley Kornblum says: 'It's absolutely incredible to witness the eggs being expelled and the larvae swimming around. This is a ground-breaking achievement and offers us a long-awaited opportunity to expand our knowledge on temperate coral reproduction, especially larval development and settlement, key areas highlighted by our group's previous work but unobserved until now! This is a big step in our understanding of the species and conservation of the pink sea fan.'

Ends

Horniman Press Office – 020 8291 8166 – press@horniman.ac.uk
University of Exeter, Alex Morrison – 07825 770679 – A.Morrison@exeter.ac.uk

Pictured: Images and caption/credit information are available to download <https://we.tl/t-YdPUIQ9Xut>

Notes to Editors:

- **Project Coral** is an innovative coral reproductive research project led by the Horniman Aquarium with international partners to develop techniques to stimulate coral reproduction. Since 'cracking the code' to induced lab-based coral spawning in 2013, the Horniman Museum and Gardens has worked with academic institutions and aquaria around the world on coral research and reef restoration projects with real world impacts. At its home in the Horniman Aquarium, the Project Coral team is currently working with corals from Australia, Indonesia, and Fiji, with the next major lab-based spawning event expected in November.
- **The University of Exeter** is a Russell Group university that combines world-class research with high levels of student satisfaction. Exeter has over 30,000 students and sits within the Top 15 universities in The Guardian University Guide 2023, and in the top 150 globally in both the QS World Rankings 2022 and THE World University Rankings 2023. In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF), more than 99% of our research was rated as being of international quality, and our world-leading research impact has grown by 72% since 2014, more than any other Russell Group university. www.exeter.ac.uk
- **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 a World Gallery of anthropology, music, an acclaimed aquarium, The Studio – a flexible arts and exhibition space, and a natural history gallery (closed until 2026 for redevelopment as part of [Nature + Love](#)). 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. The Natural History Gallery is closed for redevelopment as part of our [Nature + Love](#) project. The gallery will reopen in 2026. horniman.ac.uk
- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** was [Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022](#), the world's largest museum prize.
- The **Horniman Museum and Gardens** relies on income from ticket sales, memberships, the shop and the Café to help care for the Gardens, animals and Aquarium residents, to run events and to look after the collections. The support of our visitors and donors is hugely appreciated. horniman.ac.uk/support-us
- The **Horniman Museum and Gardens** is core-funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and since 1990 has been governed by an independent charitable trust, registered charity no. 802725.
- On 29 July 2019 the **Horniman Museum and Gardens declared an ecological and climate emergency**, pledging to place carbon reduction and environmental issues at the heart of its work. The declaration – and the subsequent **Climate and Ecological Manifesto**, published in January 2020 – is a consolidation of existing work and a commitment to renewed ambitions to reduce the Horniman's environmental and pollution footprint, increase biodiversity, and inspire others to do so. Find out more about the Horniman's manifesto commitments and progress so far at horniman.ac.uk/climate.