THE 2010 CORAL BLEACHING EVENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MUSHROOM CORAL FAUNA OF KOH TAO, WESTERN GULF OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT: During two surveys of the mushroom coral fauna of Koh Tao, a total of 20 species was recorded. The first survey (June 2010) was during a coral bleaching event caused by elevated seawater temperatures. Bleaching in mushroom corals appeared to be depth-dependent at the deepest sites with less bleaching occurring below 20 m depth. Some fungiid species, like Ctenactis echinata, appeared to be less susceptible to bleaching than others. This species was affected very little and was represented by regularly coloured individuals among many bleached specimens of other mushroom coral species. Few corals of Fungia fungites showed bleaching on the shallow reef flats but many were bleached on the slopes. During the second survey (February 2011), Koh Tao’s mushroom coral fauna appeared to have recovered and no trace of thermal bleaching was visible anymore.

Key words: Coral bleaching, Gulf of Thailand, Koh Tao, mushroom corals, recovery