

## **Expedition Aboard D/Y Catniss June 2019**

The International SeaKeepers Society joined researchers from the University of Texas to conduct coral research aboard D/Y Catniss. The expedition's objective is to identify which environmental parameters pose the most problems for corals in the Keys. The team will take coral samples which will be analyzed to see where they exhibit genetic changes associated with adaptation to the harshness of their local environment. This information will be compared to the map of known environmental conditions, to see which conditions have the most influence on corals.

### **Expedition Profile**

**June 1<sup>st</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, aboard D/Y Catniss**

The International SeaKeepers Society joined researchers from the University of Texas to conduct coral research aboard D/Y Catniss, a 44' power catamaran, which was ideal for the project's needs. Mikhail (Misha) Matz led the team which consisted of postdoctoral associate J.P. Rippe, Ph.D. student Evelyn Abbott, and research assistant Irina Yakushenok. The expedition spanned the Florida coral reef tract from the Dry Tortugas, and all the way up the Florida Keys to Key Biscayne over a period of 15 days.

The objective was to identify which environmental parameters pose the most problems for corals in the Keys. The team took samples of two species of corals that are most likely to evolve in response to local conditions, which will be analyzed to see where they exhibit genetic changes associated with adaptation to the harshness of their local environment. This information will be compared to the map of known environmental conditions, to see which of these conditions have the most influence on corals. Upon completion of the expedition, 644 samples were collected from 63 different sites throughout the Florida Keys.

As the effects of climate change become more and more pronounced, it is important to assess what these changes mean for our ecosystems. Can corals adapt and survive? Or will we see corals and other reef-dwelling animals dwindle to the point of extinction? Hopefully the data collected and analyzed by Prof. Matz and his lab will help answer these questions.

Special Thanks to GMT for travel accommodations.

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