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Lakshadweep's 'Potato Patch' — One of the World's Largest Living Coral Colonies

2 June 2026 ·

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Lakshadweep's 'Potato Patch' — One of the World's Largest Living Coral Colonies

2 June 2026 · 3 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

Researchers have documented a **giant coral colony near Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep** — a massive ***Pavona clavus*** formation locally called the “**Potato Patch**” covering approximately **4,250 square metres** (about 0.43 hectares). Preliminary growth-rate estimates suggest the colony is **700 to 1,800 years old**, and it could be among the **world’s largest known single living coral colonies**. The study also found that **58.47% of its tissue remains alive** — a sign of remarkable resilience given repeated bleaching events and marine heatwaves.

DISCOVERY AT A GLANCE

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Species	<i>Pavona clavus</i> (a reef-building / hermatypic coral)
Location	Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep
Local name	“Potato Patch”
Size	~4,250 sq m (~0.43 ha; ~1.05 acres)
Estimated age	700–1,800 years (needs scientific dating to confirm)
Tissue alive	58.47% — indicates relatively healthy state
Significance	Possibly one of the world’s largest known single living coral colonies

ABOUT PAVONA CLAVUS

- *Pavona clavus* is a species of **stony (scleractinian) coral** belonging to the family **Agariciidae**.
- It grows as a massive, mound-shaped colony (“massive coral”) — unlike branching or table corals.
- **Slow-growing** species — making a 4,250 sq m colony a multi-century-old ecosystem.
- **Reef-building** (hermatypic) — contributes calcium carbonate skeleton to the reef structure.

LAKSHADWEEP'S CORAL ECOSYSTEMS

FEATURE	DETAIL
Islands	36 islands, atolls, and reef systems; 12 inhabited
Coral-reef area	Among India's most pristine and biodiverse coral ecosystems
IUCN status	Part of Indian Ocean biodiversity hotspot
Threats	Marine heatwaves (bleaching) , ocean acidification, rising sea temperatures, anchoring damage
Governance	Lakshadweep is a Union Territory (centrally administered); marine protected areas under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act

WHY COLONY SIZE MATTERS

- **Genetic diversity reservoir** — a centuries-old mega-colony is a genetic repository of climate-adapted coral strains.
- **Reef structure** — massive corals are the **backbone** of reefs; their size contributes to reef **accretion** and coastal protection.
- **Resilience signal** — 58.47% live tissue after repeated bleaching events (2016, 2020, 2025) shows this colony has exceptional thermal tolerance — a trait of high conservation value.
- **Scientific benchmark** — mega-colonies allow scientists to study multi-century responses to environmental change without **proxy** records.

CONTEXT — CORAL BLEACHING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Coral bleaching occurs when elevated sea surface temperatures (SSTs) cause coral to expel their **zooxanthellae** (symbiotic algae that provide 70-90% of the coral's energy via photosynthesis). Without zooxanthellae, corals turn white and, if stress persists, die.

- The 2025–26 global bleaching event (NOAA confirmed 4th global bleaching event) affected Indian Ocean reefs including Lakshadweep.
- India's average SST in the Arabian Sea has risen faster than global ocean averages.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
GS3	Environment — coral reefs, bleaching, marine biodiversity, climate change
GS1	Geography — Lakshadweep, Indian Ocean islands, atolls
Prelims	<i>Pavona clavus</i> ; Lakshadweep (UT, 12 inhabited); coral bleaching mechanism (zooxanthellae); NOAA global bleaching events; hermatypic / scleractinian corals

FACTS CORNER

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LAKSHADWEEP “POTATO PATCH” CORAL:

Species: *Pavona clavus* (stony coral, family Agariciidae)

Location: Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep (UT)

Size: ~4,250 sq m (~0.43 ha)

Estimated age: 700-1,800 years (scientific dating pending)

Live tissue: 58.47%

Significance: possibly world's largest known single living coral colony

CORAL BLEACHING:

Triggered by elevated SST → coral expels zooxanthellae (symbiotic algae) → turns white

Prolonged stress → death

LAKSHADWEEP: 36 ISLANDS; 12 INHABITED; UNION TERRITORY; KADMAT IS ONE OF THE INHABITED ISLANDS

HERMATYPIC CORALS: REEF-BUILDING CORALS; SECRETE CALCIUM CARBONATE SKELETON

Sources: *Down to Earth*, *The Hindu*, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Source: Lakshadweep's 'Potato Patch' — One of the World's Largest Living Coral Colonies — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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