



WOODS HOLE
OCEANOGRAPHIC
INSTITUTION

2023 Geodynamics Seminar

A new normal for Caribbean reefs?



Dr. Howard Lasker

University of Buffalo

Thursday, March 9, 2023

1:30 – 2:30pm

Clark Lab 507, Quissett Campus,
WHOI

Coral reefs throughout the tropics have experienced large declines in the abundance of scleractinian corals. This is especially true of Caribbean reefs, where scleractinians are no longer the dominant member of the benthos. Macroalgae have increased in abundance throughout the Caribbean, but on reefs where they have been monitored arborescent octocorals, gorgonians, have persisted and are numerically and functionally dominant on some reefs. The persistence of octocorals on Caribbean reefs can in large part be related to their relative resistance to stresses such as coral bleaching and diseases, and populations have been adversely affected to the resilience driven by recruitment, rapid growth and potentially by feedback driven by the hydrodynamics of the animal forest they create. Octocorals are one of several taxa that have been overlooked for decades in analyses of coral reef community dynamics. A clearer understanding of their ecology and dynamics will be critical to understanding the future of Caribbean reefs.