

"Is a warm-water cycle stripping corals of their life-blood?" asks Robert N. Langreth in a **Science News** Dec. 8, 1990 article, "Bleached Reefs." Weeks of abnormally warm water have caused the usually colorful Puerto Rican corals to expel the algae that give them their hues. A former commercial fisherman who now assists marine botanists at the University of Puerto Rico in Lajas, says: "Some people say this is normal. I'm 42 and I've been working in the water all this time, and I've never seen something like this before."

Apparently, scientists have known about coral bleaching for at least 75 years, according to Langreth, but the phenomenon became widespread only in the last decade. The summer and fall of 1987 brought the world's most extensive bleaching on record. In past years, most of the faded reefs recovered during winter, but this year many researchers worry that corals, weakened by repeated bleachings, may actually die.

The issue has drawn the attention of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. At an October 1990 subcommittee hearing, reef researchers ventured the disturbing prediction that the current coral fadeout may signify the beginning of the expected global greenhouse warming.