

SCIENCE / ENVIRONMENT

# Dal students raising money for offshore coral protection

BY JANET FRENCH

Some Dalhousie Biology students are banding together to raise money for the Canadian Ocean Habitat Protection Society.

The students are organizing a fundraiser as part of a project for a class called Nature Conservation, taught by Dr. J. H. M. Willison, a Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies. The event, scheduled for Mar. 15, will begin at the King's Ward Room and then move to the Velvet Olive, and features several local bands, including the Artful Dodgers.

Created in 1996, the Canadian Ocean-Habitat Protection Society (COHPS) is an organization which promotes the preservation and protection of Coral Reefs in Nova Scotia. Founder Derek Jones, who worked in the fishing industry for many years, began to write letters to the Nova Scotia Government in 1984, calling for the government to stop funding dragnets, bottom-gillnets and scallop dredging. All of these activities ruin the coral forest on the ocean floor.

Coral is crucial in the ocean habitat because it supports micro-organisms, eggs and juvenile fish.

Coral can live for centuries and has been the root of the success of the Nova Scotia fishing industry for the past 500 years.

But Jones is still frustrated

with the apparent apathy of the provincial and federal governments towards this cause.

"The federal government has spent billions and billions of Canadian tax dollars building the world's largest dragger fleet and the world's largest oil platforms," Jones said. "Acknowledging the animals and mammals that must try to survive in the area would cost our present politicians their squeaky-clean environmental image."

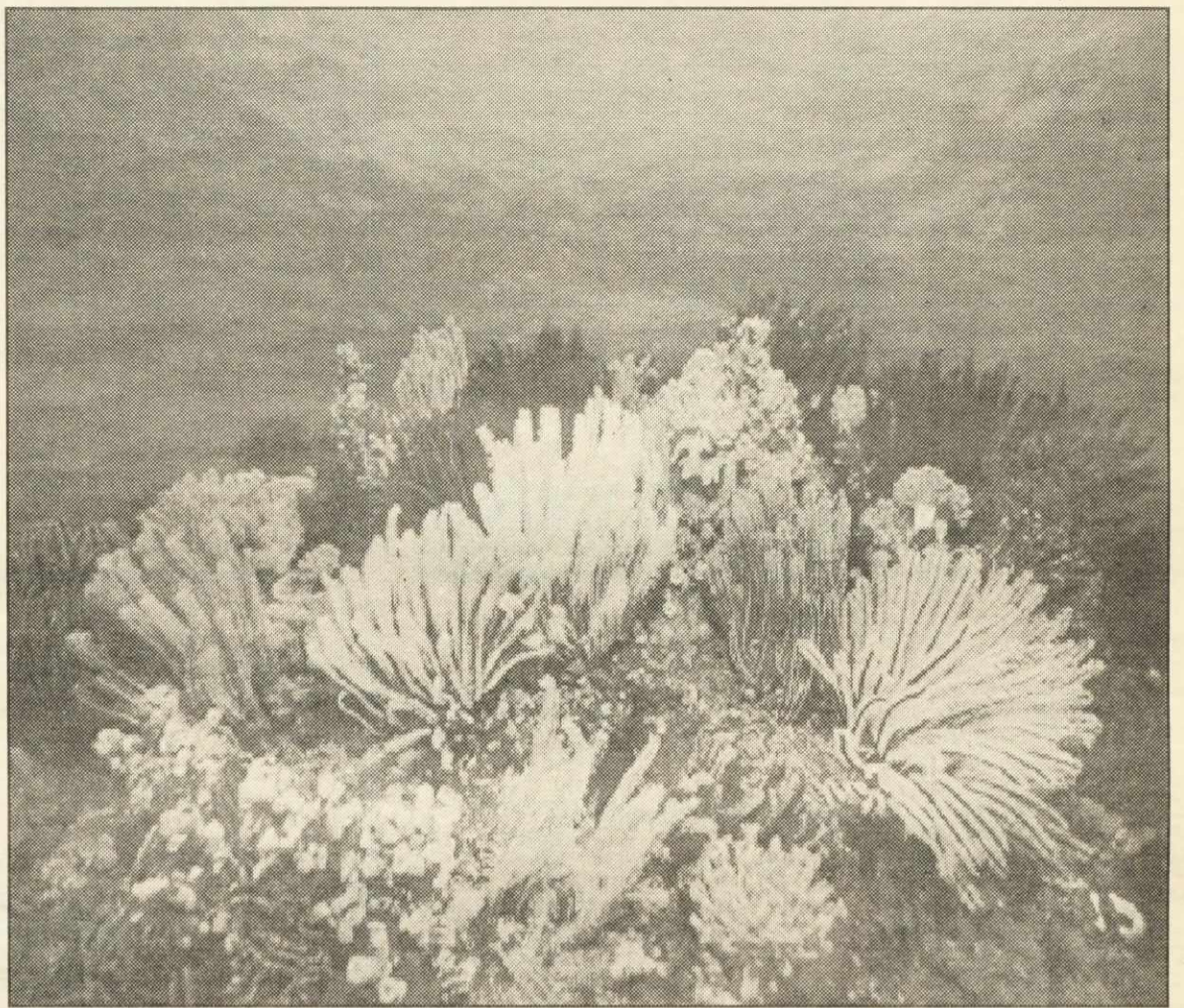
"If nobody knows about the environmental costs of bottom-dragging and ocean drilling, then our governments are free of all responsibilities and liabilities for damages done."

COHPS promotes their cause by conducting public displays at community events and visiting schools in southwestern Nova Scotia. However, the group is strapped for cash because they are funded solely by the dues of their 24 members. COHPS receives no government subsidiaries and very little contribution from the private sector.

Dr. Willison, who is a member

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of COHPS, acknowledges that unlike most ecology action groups, COHPS has a unique and specialized cause which may make it difficult to capture the attention



LIFE IN THE COLONIES: Coral doing what coral does, very, very slowly.

and support of the public.

"COHPS focuses on ocean habitat protection, which is [only] a segment of the issues that most environmental groups deal with," Dr. Willison said. "[These groups] tend to pay little attention to what goes on at the bottom of the ocean."

Biology student Virginia Roberts is a member of the group organizing the fundraiser. Roberts said that her group wanted the project to have an impact on the

community and support a worthy cause.

"We realized that no one knows about the corals off the coast of Nova Scotia and how important they are," said Roberts.

Fellow group member Elizabeth Anido was enthusiastic about fundraising because she says money does not come easily to environmental causes.

"Nowadays, most things are about the bottom dollar," said Anido. "[But] the environment and most things in it are priceless. [We wanted to] help a society that has all of the information and the means to... preserve our Nova Scotian environment."

As a follow up to the fundraiser, students from the Nature Conservation class will circulate a petition to David Anderson, the Canadian Minister of Oceans and Fisheries, imploring the government to preserve the fragile diversity of the ocean floor. The students also hope to make the public more aware of coral reef destruction.

The benefit concert for COHPS starts out at the Ward Room at 6pm on Monday, Mar. 15. The benefit then moves to The Velvet Olive at 8pm. Bands playing at the event are Hummer, Reble, Wade and Koffman and the Artful Dodgers.

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