

# Flotsam & Jetsam

**THE DIRTY CORAL PLAGUE:** Researchers may have found a culprit responsible for spreading disease in coral reefs worldwide. Dick Barber of Duke University told the June meeting of the U.S. Global Change Research Program in Washington, D.C., that a decades-long drought in the Sahel region of Africa has caused a five-fold increase in atmospheric dust that's carried throughout the world by African trade winds. The dust carries plenty of baggage, including bacteria, viruses, and fungi, and it's also rich in iron, which can fertilize reef-smothering algae. Barber blames the dust for epidemics of white band and black band disease and "coral plague," especially in the Caribbean, which receives roughly a billion tons of atmospheric dust from Africa each year. Dust is also blamed for aspergillus fungal devastation of Caribbean sea fans and severe declines in diadema sea urchins and staghorn coral.

**AUSSIE CURRENTS GRAB ANOTHER ONE:** Last month we reported on the ordeal of Paul Lucas, a 37-year-old British diver who was caught by an eddy and spent over 24 hours adrift before he washed up on a barrier island and was rescued. This month the Aussies did it again: 80-year-old Californian Ursula Margaret Clutton disappeared January 11 while snorkeling with approximately 300 other tourists on Agincourt Reef, quite near the area where Thomas and Eileen Lonergan vanished in January, 1998. After a head count by the crew of the Quicksilver Cruises boat turned up short, several additional vessels and half a dozen aircraft were dispatched, but two days' searches found no trace of Clutton, who is presumed drowned. While Clutton had apparently been snorkeling without a buddy, Quicksilver Cruises director Max Shepherd said that she had been snorkeling near the boat and that the company had a look-out on duty.

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