

The agaricid corals form a small part of the large number of reef-building corals. Of the six genera found world-wide, three are very common in local waters, namely *Pavona*, *Leptoseris*, and *Pachyseris*. These corals may be boulder-shaped (massive) or encrusting, or more commonly laminar (plate-like) or foliaceous (leaf-like). They are common on protected reef slopes and in lagoons.

The genus *Pavona* can be differentiated from the other two by the presence of corallites on both sides of the plate (bifacial). The corallites are inter-connected by thick plate-like walls called septo-costae. *Pavona* species are usually found on the upper reef slopes. Some of the species are capable of attaining large dimensions, for ex-

ample *Pavona cactus*, which can grow to 10 metres in diameter in turbid waters. This species has thin, contorted and upright fronds, which are pale or greenish brown in colour. Together with another species, *Pavona decussata*, whose colonies have thick, inter-connecting laminae, they are known to harbour various species of porcellanid (*Porcellana* sp.) and hairy (*Pilumnus* sp.) crabs. Growth form and colour variation in this genus can be quite varied. *Pavona explanulata* for instance, has colonies that are encrust-

ing or has thin laminae, but it may sometimes be submassive or columnar. This species is distinguished by a distinct column called the columellae rising from the centre of the corallite. Also, the polyps extend their tentacles during the day, and the colour of the colonies may range from grey, brown, pink, purple, green, yellow to mottled. In *Pavona clavus*, the growth form may be columnar, laminar, or both. This species is found mainly on the upper reef slopes that are exposed to currents.

THE CORALS OF THE FAMILY



The foliose growth form of *Pavona decussata* allows it to harbour various species of porcellanid and hairy crabs.

Pavona clavus has a columnar growth form.

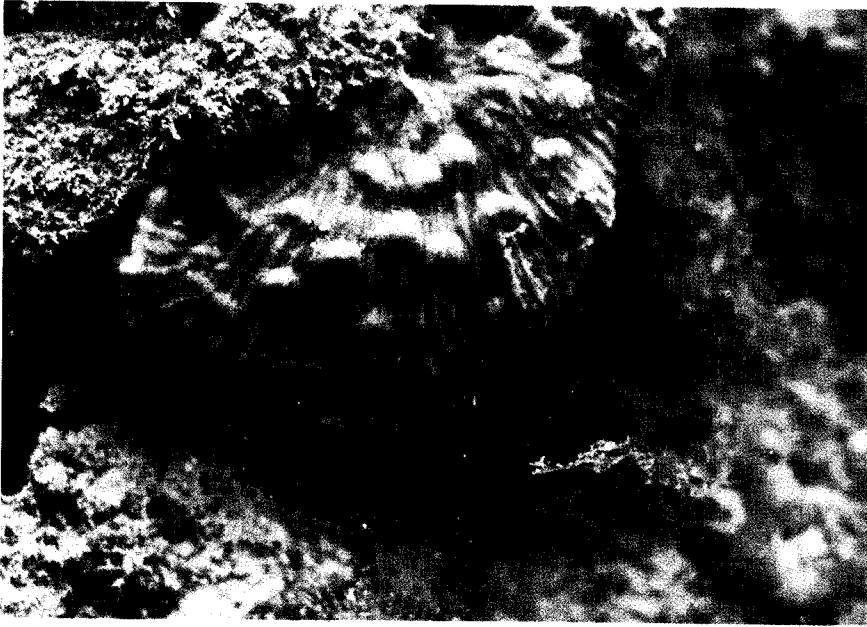


AGARICIDAE

by Jeffrey Low and L.M. Chou

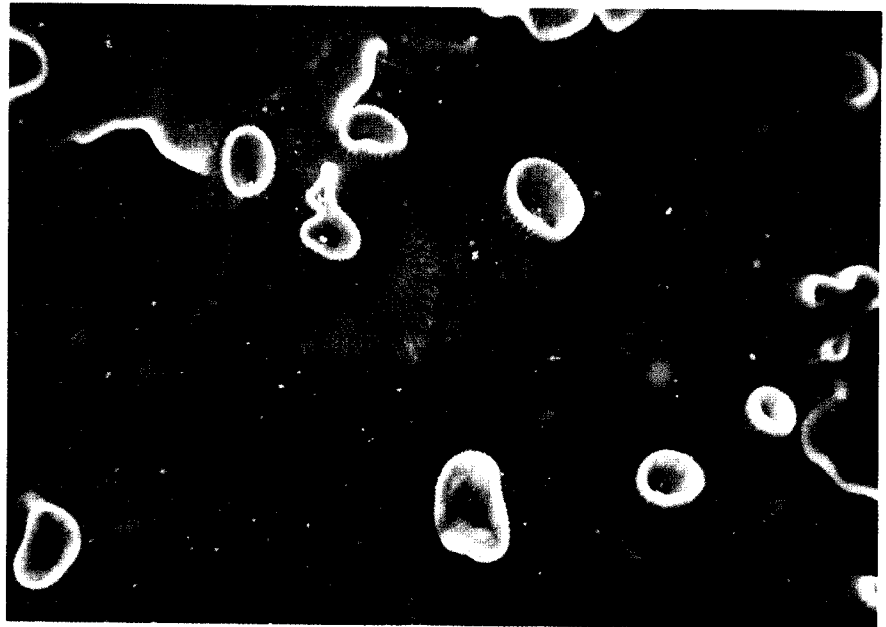


The skeletal structure of *Pavona varians* reveals corallites situated between prominent ridges.



Leptoseris explanata has prominent outward facing corallites.

Colonies of *Leptoseris* can usually be found on the lower reefslopes, under overhangs or in the openings of caverns, and also on lagoon floors and on the ocean floor between reefs. The corallites are found only on one face of the colony (unifacial), and are separated by irregular ridges. *Leptoseris explanata* has laminae that are either lobed or entire, and may be contorted or partly upright. The corallites are widely spaced and facing outward, and the septo-costae form conspicuous radiating ridges. The colonies are pale or yellow brown with white margins. *Leptoseris scabra* is encrusting and is highly contorted, sometimes forming hollow columns and tubes. The corallites are not outwardly inclined, and the colonies are coloured dull grey or brown green with white margins.



A highly contorted growth form of *Leptoseris scabra*, which results in the formation of hollow tubes.

Colonies of *Pachyseris* are similar to *Leptoseris*, being laminar and unifacial, but the plates are highly contorted, with concentric ridges running parallel to the edge. The colonies may also be branching. The corallite centres are not distinct, and there has been no record of extended polyps being seen in the day or night. Only two species have so far been found in Singapore. *Pachyseris rugosa* has upright and contorted plates, and may be coloured deep bluish grey or brown. The colonies have been reported to grow to eight metres in diameter in shallow turbid waters. *Pachyseris speciosa*, on the other hand, may grow in a wide range of habitats, but usually does not exceed two metres in diameter. It is pale brown to deep grey, and is laminate, although upright ridges and columns may develop.

□



The ridges in *Pachyseris rugosa* are highly convoluted.



Pachyseris speciosa has unmistakable prominent concentric ridges.