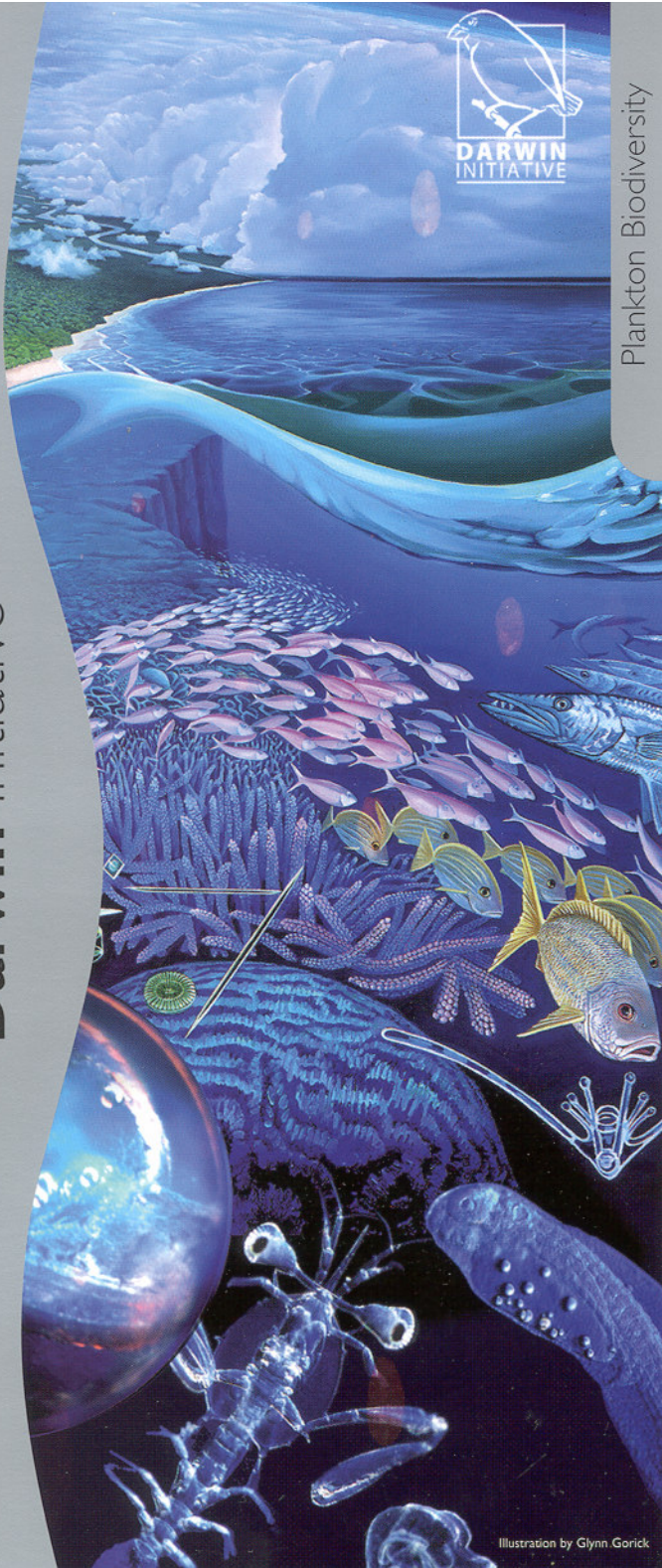


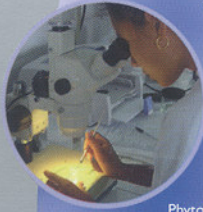
Darwin Initiative



Plankton Biodiversity

Illustration by Glynn Gorick

What is plankton?



Most life in the oceans is comprised of microscopic plants and animals called PLANKTON. Plankton are therefore one of the most important forms of life on Earth. They consist of plants (phytoplankton) and animals (zooplankton) that drift in the world's oceans and they form the base of the marine food chain.

Phytoplankton form the pastures of the sea and is comprised of thousands of species of microscopic plant cells less than 1 mm in diameter. Many are so small you need microscopes to see them. Like plants on land they contain chlorophyll and because of their abundance in the sea they can be monitored from space by satellites which detect ocean colour (chlorophyll).

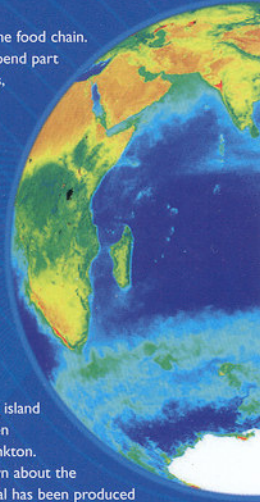


Why are the zooplankton so important?

They are at the base of the marine food chain. Many important marine organisms spend part of their life cycle in the plankton (e.g. Crabs, Lobsters, Octopus and Shellfish).

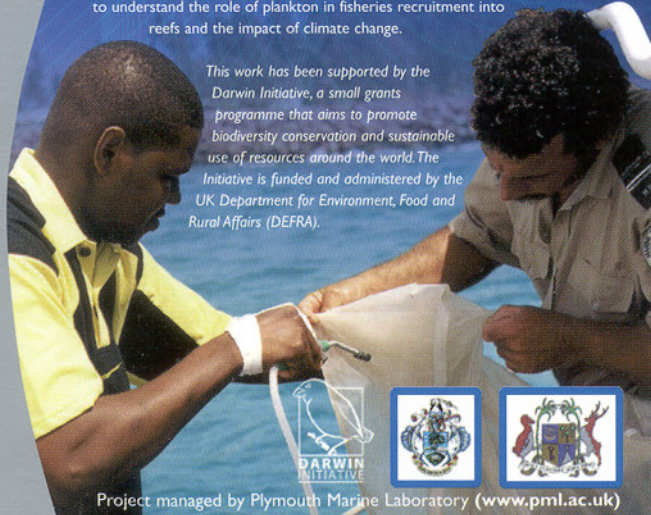
They contain the eggs and larvae of fish.

They play a very important part in the global carbon cycle, which includes the balance of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂, the main greenhouse gas that is responsible for global warming).



What have we been doing?

In the Seychelles, Mauritius and the off lying island of Rodrigues teams of local people have been trained to identify and monitor their zooplankton. Before the work started very little was known about the zooplankton in the region. Now a large manual has been produced identifying most of the zooplankton. New species have been found and described and local teams are setting up long term research programmes to understand the role of plankton in fisheries recruitment into reefs and the impact of climate change.



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