**The Reefs of Amami-Oshima**

The reefs around Amami-Oshima are a mix of fringing and barrier reefs, the majority being the former. Fringing reefs are formed close to a sloping shoreline by stony coral larvae that attach to submerged rocks. The coral polyps then secrete layers of limestone, or calcium carbonate, and leave their skeletons behind when they die. The reef grows seaward as new layers of coral are added, creating a flat, shallow area that extends from the shore, known as the reef flat or lagoon. The corals that grow in the reefs of Amami-Oshima come in many forms, including table corals that grow in a broad horizontal plane, branching corals, which have numerous offshoots, and clump coral.

*Life support from the south*

The development of Amami-Oshima's reefs is largely due to the Kuroshio current. The strong, fast flow of the current brings warm waters and coral reef larvae northward from the coast of the Philippines, where it begins, and mixes with local coastal waters. Recent studies suggest that the underwater disturbance caused when the current comes into contact with the shoreline contributes to the supply of nutrients to these areas.

*Protection and a home for wildlife*

The coral reefs have an enormous impact on the island's environment. They help protect the coastline from the effects of powerful waves, including tsunami. They are a rich, biologically diverse habitat for marine life, including crabs, sea urchins, sponges, and many species of fish. The reef flats also attract migratory and resident wading birds, who feed in the shallow waters. Amami-Oshima's reefs are an important part of this Natural World Heritage Site.