



**WON'T
SOMEONE
PLEASE THINK
OF THE BENTHOS?**

Ruby Lamb

WHAT ARE BENTHOS?

Benthic organisms (benthos) are creatures that live on or close to the seafloor, in what is known as the benthic zone.

A FEW SPECIES YOU MIGHT FIND IN ANTARCTICA:

- Sea stars such as
Odontaster validus
- Giant Volcano Sponge
- *Glyptonotus antarcticus*
(an isopod)
 - Plus soft corals,
bivalves, and more!

WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Benthos munch on dead matter, which releases nutrients back into the water for other marine animals.

They also store carbon in their bodies.

WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Finally, they're pretty
tasty themselves and are
a food source for many
species in the Antarctic
food web.

But many are now under
threat from...

WARMING OCEANS

Subsurface waters in the Southern Ocean are warming up, all because it absorbs more heat from the atmosphere than any other ocean in the world [1].

WARMING OCEANS

For some benthos, this
can have dire
consequences.

A study of 963 benthic
species found that 577
are likely to experience a
reduction in available
habitat as waters warm
[2].

CHANGES TO THE CRYOSPHERE

Climate change is also causing changes to Antarctica's ice and snow.

For benthos, the biggest issues with this are glacial retreat and decreasing sea ice.

CHANGES TO THE CRYOSPHERE

This is because more frequent ice-scouring reduces benthic diversity, while decreasing sea ice is altering where certain benthic species live [3].

ANCHOR DAMAGE

In the 2023-2024 season,
72 tourist vessels
traveled to Antarctica
[4]. That's not counting
the fishing and research
vessels!

Many used anchors to
maintain their position.

ANCHOR DAMAGE

New research suggests that when dropped, these anchors damage and destroy sponge colonies [5].

Their slow-growing nature means that recovery could take decades.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Raise awareness of benthos and the importance of Marine Protected Areas in protecting them.
- Make greener choices in your daily life.
- If travelling to Antarctica, use other methods of anchoring.

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