

» **CelebritySecretSpot**

## Coral Keeper

Our celebrity: Darla J. White, reef expert

By **Bonnie Friedman** | Photo by **Ron Dahlquist**

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Reef expert Darla J. White shares her "hope spot" at Kahekili Beach Park.

The moment you meet her, it's clear Darla White is living her passion. "During the last 11 years, I've had the rare privilege to dive just about every island in the Hawaiian archipelago—I can tell you it's a very, very special place," she says. Her "aha" moment came 12 years ago during her marine biology studies at a Santa Monica, California, junior college. Currently the special projects coordinator for the Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Aquatic Resources Maui Marine Monitoring, she set her career path once she learned she could get paid for diving. After stints with an underwater surveying program at University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the West Hawai'i Aquarium Project, she moved to Maui in 2006 with a bachelor's degree from UH Hilo. She works with the Kahekili Herbivore Fisheries Management Area, which protects the algae-eating fish that consume the overgrowth of seaweed that results from land-based pollution. This, in turn, helps protect a fragile coral reef. "It's a brand new strategy, the first of its kind in the world," she says.

### Her Secret Spot

#### The Reef at Kahekili

"It's a real 'hope spot,'" White says of this highly stressed reef, which reaches from the south edge of Honokowai Beach Park down to Keka'a Point. "But the structure is still there, and there's a lot worth saving." White, who is also the Maui Island coordinator for the Eyes of the Reef Network, loves everything about Kahekili. "The reef holds endless wonder, the beach is gorgeous, and the water is calm and clear. It all makes me feel hopeful." The reef as an ecosystem, White explains, "can be too big a concept for some people to wrap their heads around. I compare it to a Ferrari engine—a finely tuned machine, every part needs to be clean, every part relies on others, and if one part gets broken or removed, it affects the parts around it. It's the same for ecosystems. The best thing we can do to fix them is to remove the stressors. Because nature is amazing and resilient . . . if we let it be."