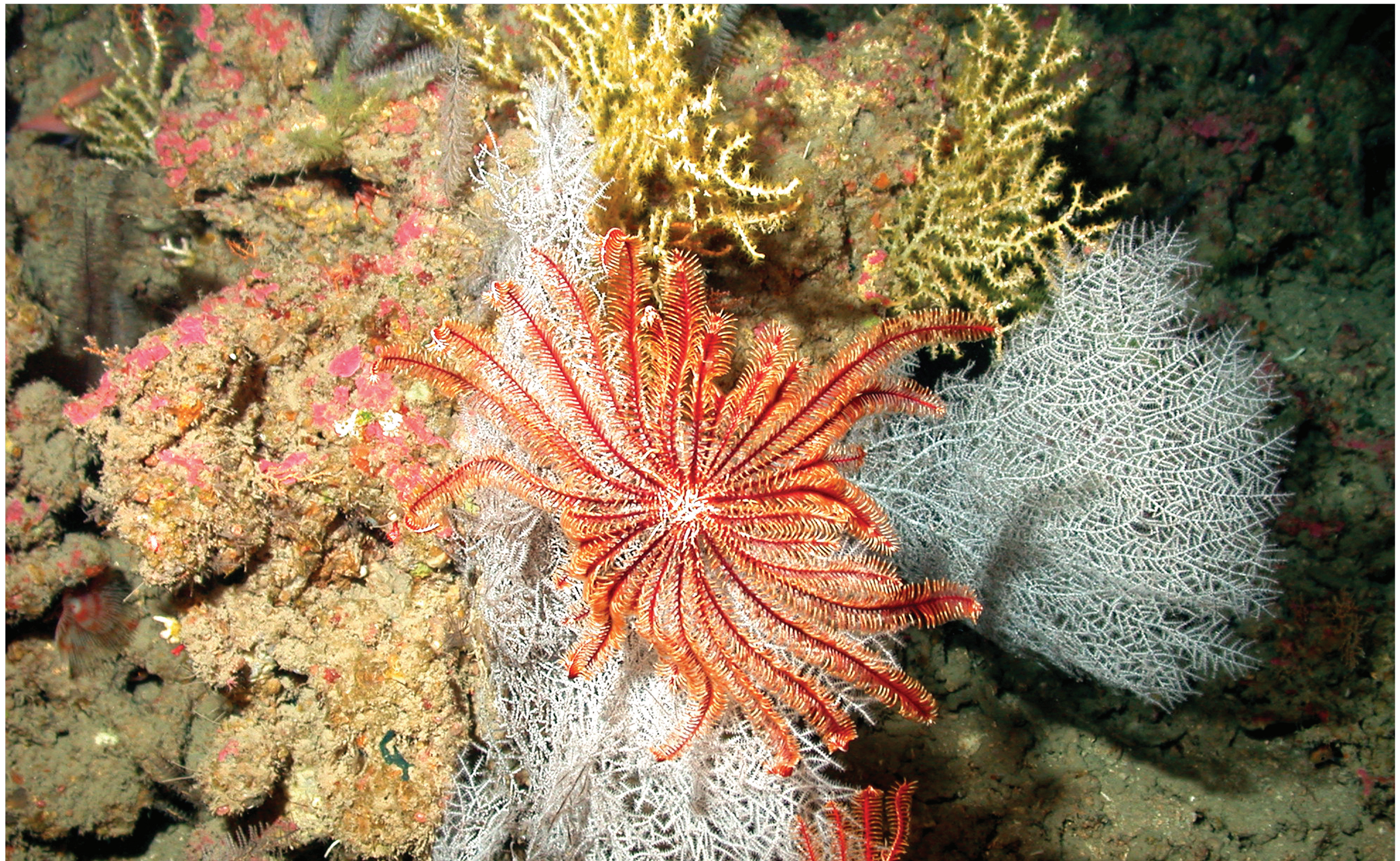


GULF OF MEXICO



FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, located roughly 115 miles south of the Texas/Louisiana coast, is part of a connected ecosystem of banks, patch reefs, and valleys along the continental shelf of the northwestern Gulf of Mexico. While stony corals dominate the shallow reef crests of the sanctuary, beautiful mesophotic reefs, supporting a variety of fishes, invertebrates, sea fans, and whips, extend throughout the 'twilight zone' (~130-500 feet) around these banks. These mesophotic coral ecosystems provide valuable habitat for many different species, and are considered an important component of the habitat highways connecting the banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico. Remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) are important tools used to explore the 'twilight zone' and were used to capture these images.

A colorful sea lily, or crinoid, stands upon a white-colored black coral fan, extending its long arms to filter the water for food. Surrounding the sea lily are several yellow gorgonian sea fans and white, green, and purple-colored black coral bottlebrushes.

West Flower Garden Bank, 353ft – Photograph by FGBNMS/NURC-UNCW