

# BLUE & GREEN LAAMU

*The Marine Conservation & Sustainability  
Newsletter by the Maldives Underwater Initiative*

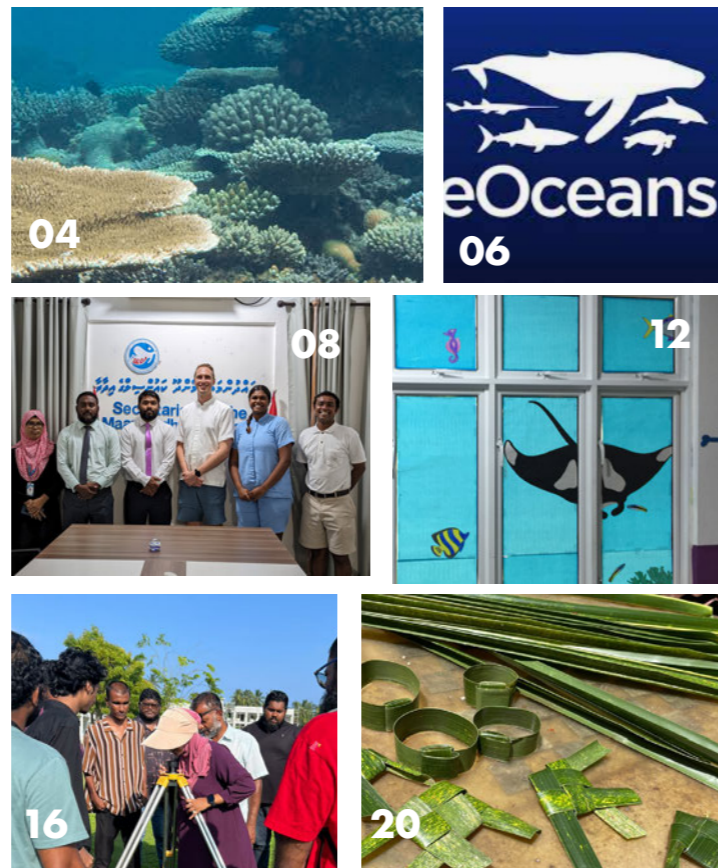
FEBRUARY 2024







MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu

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## THE BIG STUFF IN 95% OF OBSERVATIONS

-  **39%** had blacktip reef sharks
-  **43%** had whitetip reef sharks
-  **53%** had hawksbill turtles
-  **56%** had green turtles

## OUR EDUCATION

-  **1659** moments of education were shared with guests
-  **155** moments of education were shared with hosts
-  **94** moments of education were shared with the community



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# SIX SENSES CONSERVATION

## KEEPING UP WITH THE CORALS

The MUI team has been continually monitoring Laamu's coral reefs over many years, however it is of particular importance this year due to the anticipation and reports of a predicted major bleaching event to happen in the Maldives this year.

Along with increasing sea surface temperatures this bleaching prediction is driven due to the global climatic event El Niño, which began last year and has already caused mass bleaching in the Caribbean, Australia, and elsewhere around the world.

Unfortunately this bleaching event is predicted to hit the Maldives around April-May 2024, and it is expected to have an impact across the whole of the Maldives.

In preparation for this, the team started to collect photoquadrat data, following the Maldives Marine

Research Institute protocol to monitor the coral health. By ensuring standardized methods are followed it allows for comparison of sites between many different Atolls. By repeating the surveys during and after the bleaching, the health of the reefs can be tracked long-term and the impact of the bleaching event can be monitored.

Information gathered through this project will feed into a Maldives wide database and will allow the MUI team to assess sites in which restoration may be needed.



**23** surveys  
completed



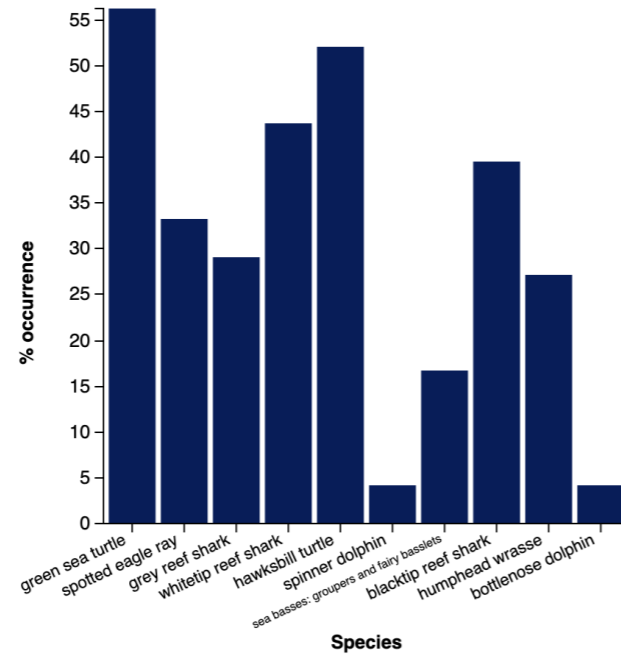
**10** sites  
surveyed

# eOCEANS RESULTS ROLLING IN!

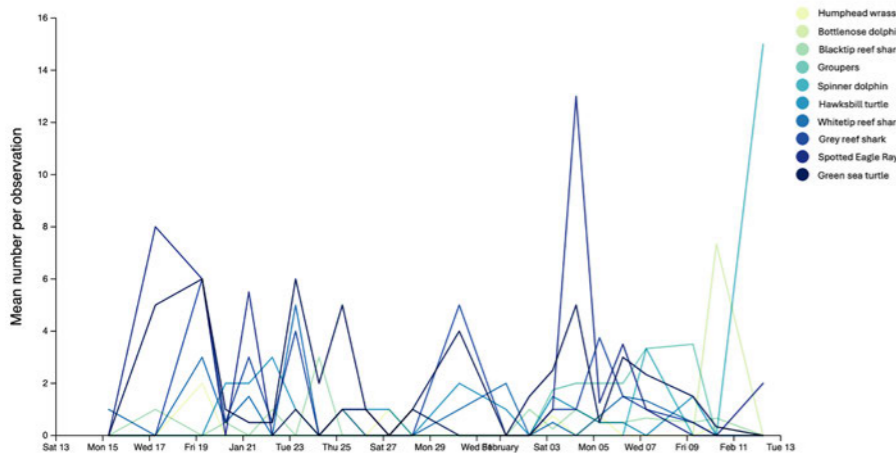
The MUI teams partnership with eOceans to develop a project on the eOceans app to track megafauna, a development of a project going for many years, is going well! The team is currently in the testing phase of this project and hopes to be able to share it with other ocean users in Laamu when it's ready! By using eOceans as a platform for this project it allows for a single data point to go to multiple projects (e.g a project just for Laamu and a Maldives wide project), and enables real time data tracking and analysis.

For each dive, snorkel, or encounter the MUI team has, we enter our data into eOceans. This can either be through a site list, or a georeferenced photo taken. The Laamu project accepts all data involving sharks, rays, turtles, groupers, and threats such as Crown of Thorns Starfish and Pollution. This way we can track the long-term trends in populations as well as the threats that they face in real time!

Total % occurrence in observations for the top 10 observed species and taxonomic groups



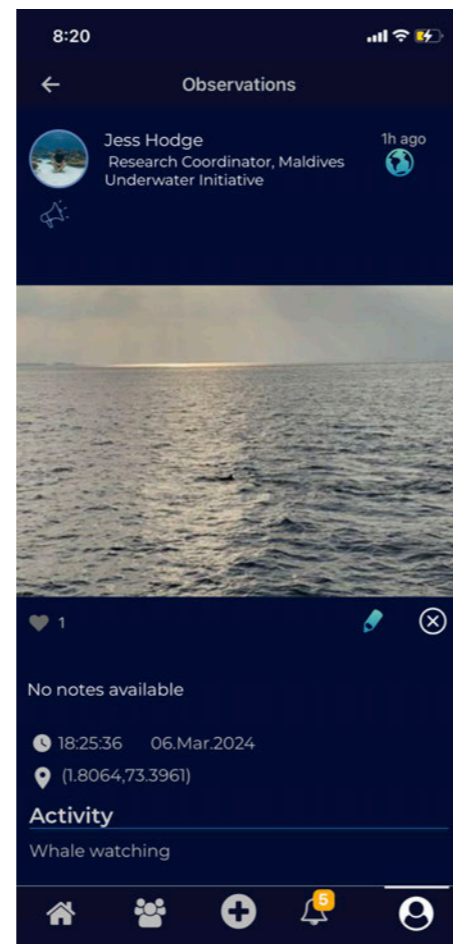
Mean count per observation over the last (or final) 30 days



- 95 observations made through eOceans
- 56% of observations included green turtles
- 53% of observations included hawksbill turtles
- 43% of observations included whitetip reef sharks
- 39% of observations included blacktip reef sharks

**10** members so far in the Laamu Megafauna project

**134** observations in the Laamu Megafauna Project



# INTERVIEW WITH MARK SHARMAN

The MUI team and guests got the opportunity this month to ask Mark all the questions that everyone wants to know about life as an underwater wildlife cinematographer. In February we invited guests and hosts to join a special interview evening with Mark Sharkman and following this insight into life in this industry, we played the award winning 'Jago : A Life Underwater' documentary of which Mark filmed all the underwater pieces. Guests and hosts loved having the opportunity to chat with Mark and to pick the brain of this award-winning cinematographer.



**50** guests joined the interview and documentary with Mark



# JMB IN FEBRUARY

In February the MUI team welcomed 10 students into the team, including 3 returning children who built on their skills and understanding from previous visits with the MUI team. Sessions included How we got here, Maldivian Megafauna and also Habitats of Laamu. These sessions give the students a great rounded understanding of much of marine biology.



**10** JMB students



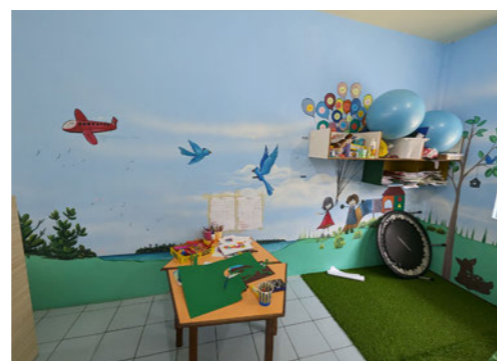
# OUR COMMUNITY

## MAMENDHOO COMMUNITY PROJECTS


This month, Lawrence, Director of Sustainability and Conservation, Adam, Sustainable Land Use Manager and Fithura, Community Engagement Coordinator, visited the local island of Maamendhoo to meet with two stakeholder groups to discuss proposed Sustainability Fund projects. Maamendhoo school

has two projects, one aimed at increasing the quality of education for children with special needs and another targeting environmental awareness with a focus on waste reuse and repurposing (heavily inspired by our Earth Lab). A meeting with Maamendhoo Council was then held, introducing Fithura to the

councilors and discussing potential collaborations and co-development opportunities for 2024. There was a focus on Waste Management, followed by a tour of the existing waste management facility, which has received funding from the national government to expand its capacity for waste storage and processing.



 **32** guests visited the Hithadhoo Mangrove

 **33** guests explored Hithadhoo town



# THE MANTA TRUST

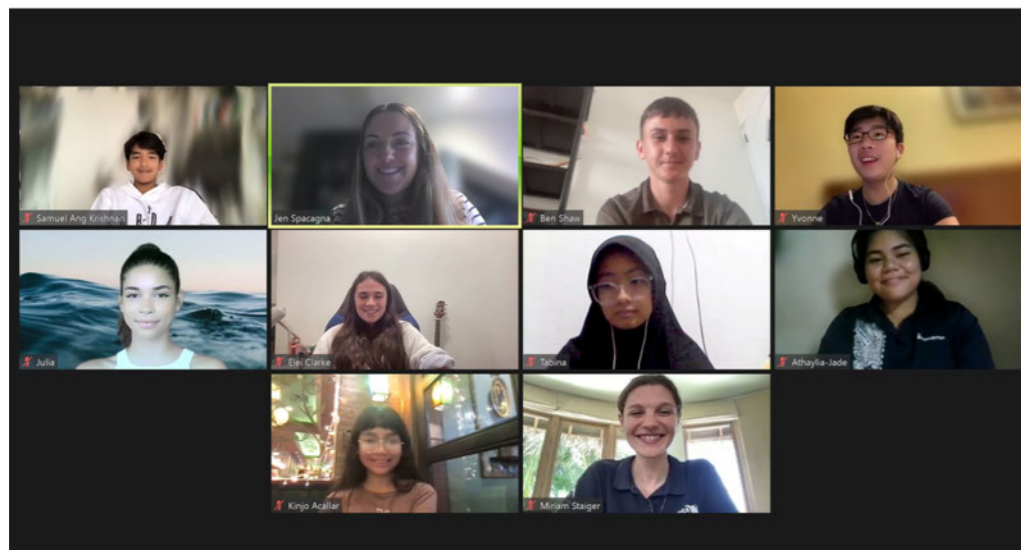


**7** Remote Underwater Video Systems deployed

**15** manta ray sightings

**6** manta rays identified

## OCEAN AMBASSADORS!



The Manta Trust has recently started a new youth programme – the Ocean Ambassadors. Over the last couple of months, young people, aged 13-18, who are motivated to take action to promote marine science and conservation were invited to apply to become Ocean Ambassadors.

Ocean Ambassadors will work with the Manta Trust to gain new skills and experiences that will help set them apart and enrich applications for future opportunities. Our key goal was that, no matter where they live or what their experience was, as long as they had a strong passion for the ocean and could commit to the programme

schedule, they should always have the chance to be supported in their goals of making change.

After having received so many great applications from motivated young individuals around the world, the team were able to select 20 Ocean Ambassadors for the programme. We now have a diverse community of young people from 17 different nationalities who are not only enthusiastic about ocean science and conservation, they are already doing fantastic things in their own countries to drive change.

The kids have committed to a year of collaboration to help develop projects

that promote ocean science and conservation, within their school and local communities - with the support of the Manta Trust team and their fellow Ocean Ambassadors, while having the unique opportunity to connect with international marine scientists, engage in eye-opening discussions, and even conduct interviews with experts in marine conservation.

This month, the group had their first two calls where the team got to know all participants. The Laamu team was excited to be able to join and can't wait to get to know the individuals better each month.

## MANTA MADNESS AT SIX SENSES



The team had some busy kids club sessions at the resort, with 17 kids enjoying manta ray classes, identifying the manta ray models of the SHELL and getting manta ray facepaints. One of the kids, Vicky, who had been at SSLM before, remembered most of the manta ray names she's learned about the last time and got a special manta ray tattoo of her favorite Laamu manta "Reggae". One of our Junior Marine Biology students, Ben, was trained in analyzing Remote Underwater Video footage and even helped the team go through some of the RUV data we had collected this month. What a mantastic month for these young ocean enthusiasts.

We hope to continue to nurture the curiosity and passion of these young minds, empowering them to become stewards of our oceans!



**17** kids engaged in manta learning

## COUNCIL MEETINGS



In February, the Manta Trust team in Laamu and the Hiithadhoo Council met to discuss future collaborations in community engagement and educational projects. We discussed the possibility of sharing co-working spaces for our Laamu community outreach work, while being able to introduce our new intern Reesha, and the team was excited to talk about the potential of an online education programme, as well as more in person community events in the future and agreed on sharing more regular updates on manta ray sightings and information at Kandu Kolhu/Hiithadhoo Corner. The team would like to thank the council for their support, and environment officer Tholal for organizing a tour through the future Baaneykolhu CCA.

# LOCAL ISLAND KID'S CLUBS

The Manta Trust team in Laamu is always trying their best to inspire the next generation to have a love for marine life and environmental responsibility. While usually all of the kids club sessions are being held with guest's children on island, the team is so excited that they now have an intern, Reesha, based in the Laamu community that enables them to communicate more regularly with different stakeholders in the atoll.

In February, the team therefore had the incredible opportunity to trial two Kids Club sessions with 21 children from the Barru-preschool in Fonadhoo. Together with the pre-school teachers, Reesha helped prepare and organize the sessions to allow the kids to get hands-on experience in making a difference.

In one session the team organized a litter picking activity where we combined sensory play and gross motor skills

to start learning about pollution and littering from a young age. In another session, we had fun pretending to be Mantas while some kids pretended to be boats that had to keep a check on their speed limit. Hit a manta and you're out! It was a good exercise learning about how our speed and consideration affects each other, the kids absolutely loved it! Afterwards we also tried to recreate a sensory learning experience by transforming one classroom into a "submarine" with the help of the lovely preschool teachers. There we spent time learning about the manta rays and their "friends" that live in Maldives waters.

We are very grateful for Barru Preschool for their eagerness to work with us and we hope to have more fun activities in the future. Teaching compassion for marine animals and raising awareness about the impact of plastic pollution is key to building a sustainable future.



 21 kids  
join in local  
kids club

# BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION



**9** fishers sold fish

**24** guest recreational fishing trips

**268** fish landed

## GUEST RECREATIONAL FISHING 300 TRIP MILESTONE!



In the September 2023 edition of Blue and Green, the Blue Marine and MRR team was delighted to announce that they had reached a milestone of collecting data for 200 recreational fishing trips and this month the team is happy to share that over the past five months, data have been collected for another 100 trips! Two thirds of the trips were at sunrise and a third at sunset; clearly people do not mind getting up early for a chance to catch their lunch or dinner, which the resort chefs will happily prepare for them. Guests are invited to participate in a citizen science 'Fisher Observer programme', which means recording data on species caught, size and catch location. The team is collecting these data with the aim of achieving a baseline understanding of the impact this activity has on reef fish populations, which is important because some reef fish are slow to reach sexual maturity and live for a long time. Blue Marine and MRR have also used these data to develop a Code of Conduct for these trips which the team wants to see other Maldivian tourist operators following which will make this activity more sustainable in the long-term.

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## FISHER OF THE MONTH - YOOSUF IBRAHIM

Yoosuf, from the nearby island of Maamendhoo, enrolled in the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa program in November 2021. Yoosuf is a well-known fisher and entrepreneur throughout the island. He engages in reef fishing, tuna fishing, and is also involved in fish processing and local sales. While Yoosuf spends his mornings trolling for semi-pelagic species of fish such as wahoo and mahi mahi, he spends the rest of the day with his family and children.

Yoosuf says that throughout his life, he has observed changes in fishing patterns in Laamu Atoll, and he is glad to be doing his part by being a part of the program and fishing sustainably, while encouraging others to do the same.



## MASMAHAA-VESHI NEW MODULE LAUNCH!

MRR and Blue Marine were delighted to host an event 'Preserving Nature through Responsible Tourism' in Male to launch the Sustainable Tourism module, which is the first module to be added to Masmahaa-Veshi since the team debuted the online education platform in April 2023 at the Coral Festival in Addu. Masmahaa-Veshi translates to 'fish, marine life and their habitats'. It is free to access and available in Dhivehi and English. Like the other five modules, there

is a short video, infographics and a fun quiz to test your knowledge. The module highlights the benefits of tourism to the Maldives but also the ways it can damage the beautiful marine environment which many visitors come here to enjoy. It suggests practical actions that the tourism industry and tourists themselves can take to help protect marine life such as following codes of conduct. The team will use this module in training sessions for tourism employees to

raise awareness of the importance of responsible tourism. Watch this space for more module launches later this year!

**1** launch event hosted

**6** Masmahaa-Veshi modules now live







**OLIVE RIDLEY  
PROJECT**

# THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT



**3** new turtles identified



**111** submissions by  
MUI and DBD



**22** in-water  
surveys complete



**1045** turtles in  
Laamu

## DRONE TRAINING WORKSHOP TAKES OFF!



The ORP and Environmental Protection Agency of the Maldives (EPA) organized and hosted a 1-week drone training workshop as part of the Laamu Sea Turtle Beach Guardian Program. The workshop was attended by the Sea Turtle Rangers and Conservation Officers - Inaan, Ibaadh, and Malsa - as well as 23 additional participants from local councils and NGOs, including Maavah and Fonadhoo Council, Maldives Heritage Society, Gan Youth Society, and members of Fonadhoo Community.

The topics covered during the workshop included an introduction to remote sensing and use of GIS (Geospatial Information Systems) software, followed by practical drone-flying and mapping sessions, and finishing with classroom sessions on spatial analysis, data processing, and map making. The aim of the workshop was not only to provide training for ORP staff, but also to create an opportunity for skill sharing and developing capacity with community stakeholders, which will hopefully foster stronger community support for the Beach Guardian Program.

## A SCARY FIND IN THE WATER

Earlier this month, a large ghost net was spotted drifting near one of the overwater villas on the lagoon side of the resort. Acting quickly and with the help of the resort gardening team, the ORP and MUI team were able to retrieve the mass of nets from the ocean and dispose of it appropriately. Fortunately, no sea turtles or other marine animals were found entangled in the net save a few broken pieces of coral, and the team were able to remove it before it caused any further harm.

responsible for the deaths of more than 650,000 marine animals every year. While the Maldives does not allow the use of nets and longlines, many nets drift into Maldivian waters from the wider Indian Ocean during the Northeast monsoon (Nov-Apr). In the Maldives, sea turtles, particularly Olive Ridley turtles, are one of the most common entanglement victims to ghost gear. Entanglements can cause sea turtles serious injuries, such as severe cuts and flipper loss, and prevent them from feeding and even breathing. Since ORP's inception in 2013, more than 630 injured sea turtles have been recorded in Maldivian waters,

with over 200 patients received by their Rescue Center in Baa Atoll.

After examining the ghost net, the ORP team found 26 different pieces of discarded fishing net and rope and estimated it to be between 150-200kg. Collecting data on ghost nets such as this is vital for ORP's research on marine debris entanglement, helping us to better understand how much fishing gear is discarded into the ocean, where they originate from, and how it is impacting marine life.



**150-200**  
kg of net removed



# WELCOME IBAADH!

Join us in welcoming Ibaadh, the new Sea Turtle Conservation Officer in Maavah!

Ibaadh was born and raised in Maavah, surrounded by the beauty of the Maldives sea. Growing up next to the beach created a special place in his heart for the ocean, and always filled him with a curiosity and readiness to explore the underwater world and its inhabitants.

After completing his O'levels, Ibaadh entered the hospitality industry in 2012 through an apprenticeship program at Four Seasons, which was also where he saw his first injured turtle at the Rehabilitation Center there. Seeing the entanglement injuries on the turtle showed him the negative impacts that humans can have on these marine creatures. When he came across the opportunity to work with the Olive Ridley Project in their mission to protect sea turtles and their habitats, he didn't hesitate to apply.

In his new role as the Sea Turtle Conservation Officer, Ibaadh will work closely with Maavah Island Council to monitor the islands, lagoons and reefs around Maavah for signs of illegal harvest activity. He will also conduct education and awareness sessions to drive long-term behavioral change towards sea turtle meat consumption within his community. We're very excited to welcome Ibaadh to the team!



# WELCOME MALSA!



Join us in welcoming Malsa, the new Assistant Sea Turtle Ranger based in L. Fonadhoo!

Being born and raised in a small island of Laamu Atoll in Maldives, Malsa has spent most of her life growing up next to the beach and in the ocean. Having her grandmother tell stories of the great unknown ocean, Malsa has always been curious about the creatures that live beneath the surface of its waves. Her interest in wildlife peaked in school where she was taught about their life history and how some of the animals we see every day came to be, which led her to pursue a Science Major all through middle school and higher education.

Malsa has been an active person in the community, keen to lend a helping hand around her and joining any volunteer work she can get involved in. She has previous experience working as a Technician at a sea cucumber farm in Laamu Atoll, and has also worked in the journalism sector. Malsa first learned about ORP in 2021, and has since had an interest in getting involved with their work to raise community

awareness for sea turtle protection. She believes it is for everyone's future benefit to preserve the balance in our marine ecosystems.

In Malsa role, she will be providing support to the Sea Turtle Ranger to monitor nesting and illegal harvest activity on L. Gaadhoo's main sea turtle nesting beach - Velaa Heylhi. She will also be helping to organise presentations and awareness sessions with the schools of L. Gan and L. Fonadhoo.



# TURTLE IN THE SPOTLIGHT!

© Julian Gervolino

Say "Hello" to Poppy (GR1091)! Poppy is one of our resident green turtles at Hiithadhoo Corner that was first identified as a female in September 2019. However, on more recent dives, the team have started noticing a bit of tail growing out! What does this mean? It means our Poppy is finally growing up into a male green turtle!

Researchers at the ORP normally classify green turtles as adults at

an estimated carapace length of 65cm and hawksbills at 60cm. Usually when they reach this size, we can identify whether the turtle is a male or female based-on the size of the tail with males growing it to the length of their back flippers!

The maturation process of marine turtles is a slow one taking 15-50 years, and they can then remain reproductively active for 10-40 years. When they are ready, turtles will undertake a remarkable

migration from their foraging grounds to their mating grounds, often returning to the area that they hatched from. This migration can be 1000s of kilometers long and span several months. While females' turtles take this journey every 2-3 years, males travel to their mating ground annually. Maybe we'll be seeing Poppy make his first journey soon!



96 sightings

# OUR HOME


 **65** guests experienced our local islands

 **24,855** bottles of water made for guests

 **47,882** KWH renewable energy

 **5,885** Kg metal recycled with SecureBag

 **371** eggs produced

 **16** Junior VIPs joined the organic garden tour

## EARTH LAB UPDATES

We are transforming our Earth Lab, from a place where things happen, to a happening place. This month, we replaced the tin roofing and our incredible Engineering team managed to reuse every piece of the old roof for other areas of the Host Village. Once the planned upgrades to the furniture, decorations and workshops are completed, our Earth Lab 2.0 will foster an environment of sustainability-focused creativity and inspiration.

Do you have any ideas or suggestions for what new workshops Earth Lab should offer? Please contact Lawrence, Director of Sustainability and Conservation (email at the end of the magazine).



 **60** guests joined the sustainability tour

 **8** guests joined Earth Lab workshops

## COCONUT PALM WEAVING



Many ocean and island cultures have a strong connection to the humble coconut palm, and the Maldives is no exception. Maldivians have relied on this versatile plant for thousands of years. Providing wood, shade, materials, water, food, cups and bowls and even medicine, it really is the Tree of Life.

Risfaan, Sustainability Coordinator, and Fithu, Community Engagement Coordinator, have been developing a new guest activity that will connect people to local Maldivian culture - coconut palm weaving. By weaving coconut palms, a skilled practitioner can make 'kadjan' roofing, baskets, bags, toys and decorations, and even the 'Bodu Mas' big fish that is used in celebration days and parades. With modern materials and technologies, weaving is no longer as popular as it once was and is at risk of being forgotten if new people and younger generations don't learn.

The weaving workshop will have you weaving a variety of small objects from fishes and watches, to birds, baskets and crabs. All while learning about Maldivian culture and the personal stories our hosts have with this incredible plant.



 **4** activity trials

 **30** fish on lines given to little VIP guests

## WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU!

We are tremendously grateful to the multitude of donors who so generously donated funds to the MUI team's research projects; we are indebted to you all.

A special shout-out to our friends who donated \$10,000 USD and more:

Jeffrey  
Andy and Amy  
Erin and Don  
Take Two London  
Sabine and Guy

We look forward to sharing with you the achievements that you made possible.

To learn more about marine conservation and sustainability initiatives at Six Senses Laamu please contact:

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To stay up to date with the latest news, events and visiting experts follow the Maldives Underwater Initiative and Six Senses Laamu on social media.

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