

BLUE & GREEN LAAMU

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

MARCH 2022

*Rikke's Reef- the new rising
star of MUI's coral research*



SIX SENSES

LAAMU



MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu

A submission by Adam Thalath, Six Senses Laamu's Sustainability and Community Outreach Manager, to the 2021 MUI Underwater Photography Competition which ranked in the top 10 shots as chosen by MUI's followers on Facebook.



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THE BIG STUFF



188 megafauna surveys were conducted by the MUI and DBD teams



1,216 sharks were sighted



537 rays were sighted



300 turtles were sighted

OUR EDUCATION



1,524 moments of education were shared with guests



64 moments of education were shared with hosts



337 moments of education were shared with the community

SIX SENSES CONSERVATION

HOSTING RENOWNED OCEAN ADVOCATES

On Wednesday, March 23, 2022, the MUI team were delighted to welcome a very special group of people to Six Senses Laamu, including Mr. Waitt, founder of the Waitt Institute, Honorable Minister Shauna of the Ministry of Environment, Climate & Technology and Honorable Minister Dr. Rasheedh of the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture, as well as members of the Noo Rajje Program. The group were in the area to learn about our sustainable tourism initiatives and to visit the local community, to identify challenges and opportunities for ocean sustainability.

Four of the Six Senses hosts within MUI represented the team though sharing the story of becoming the Maldives Underwater Initiative and some of the success stories MUI has had over the years including the Laamaseelu Masveriya Program, our Seagrass Campaign, MPAs and Sustainable Fund projects.

After presenting their work, members of the MUI team accompanied the group over the next two days whilst they enjoyed meals at the resort, visited various local islands and met with different stakeholder groups within the community including fishers, island councils and Women Development Committees.

It was a great honor to be chosen as the property for this group to visit. The experience provided the team with an opportunity to share stories about how sustainable tourism can bring needful and meaningful changes to planet & people to a very influential group. 🌊



20 ocean advocates were hosted at Six Senses Laamu for the knowledge exchange visit



CORAL SPAWNING HOTSPOT AT RIKKE'S REEF

Is Rikke's reef the new rising star of MUI's coral research? This reef, which is named after a previous intern who's project was to study the appearance of corals in this area, is a very shallow reef located between the dive jetty and the supply jetty at Six Senses Laamu. In recent months, the MUI team recorded multiple spawning events from a variety of different coral species on this small reef.

The team find it very interesting to have recorded more spawning events on Rikke's reef than on any other parts of the house reef. Future research projects might look into reasons for this. Especially due to the shallow nature of this reef, it will be important to monitor the health of these corals in regards to rising ocean temperatures. In the future, MUI will expand their monitoring efforts to include Rikke's reef as a constant part of coral spawning and bleaching monitoring protocols. 🌊



13 hours of coral spawning surveys were conducted by the team in March

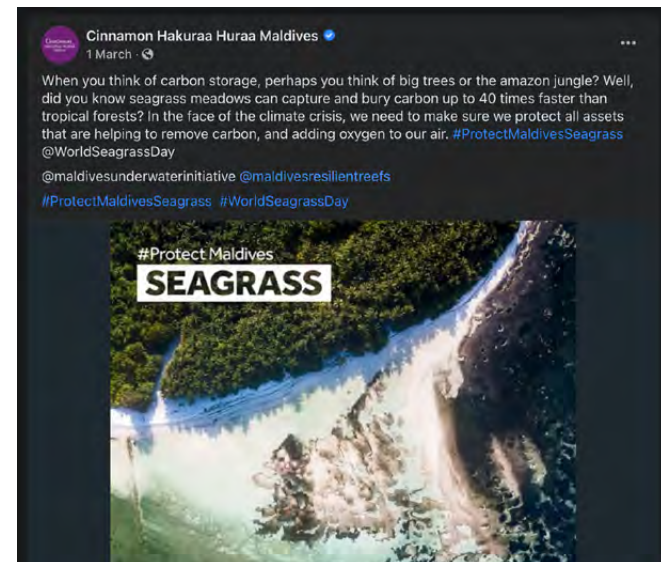


CELEBRATING WORLD SEAGRASS DAY

On World Seagrass Day, 1st March, 2019, Six Senses Laamu and Blue Marine Foundation launched the #ProtectMaldivesSeagrass campaign. Since then, the teams have been on an incredible journey to change the perception to seagrass meadows in Maldives from a nuisance that is actively removed, to a beautiful asset providing a home for wildlife.

Having gained the support of the Ministry of Tourism and more than 25% of all resorts in Maldives, the team created a national monitoring protocol to learn more about Maldives seagrass, which was officially adopted by the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture. Following this, the team launched multiple research studies, presented their findings at the Maldives Marine Science Symposium (the first ever seagrass research to be included) and ran educational webinars and workshops in their endeavour to keep seagrass in the public, scientific and political eye.

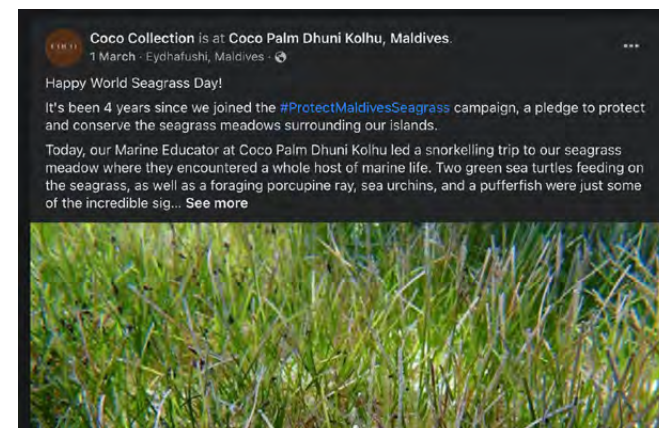
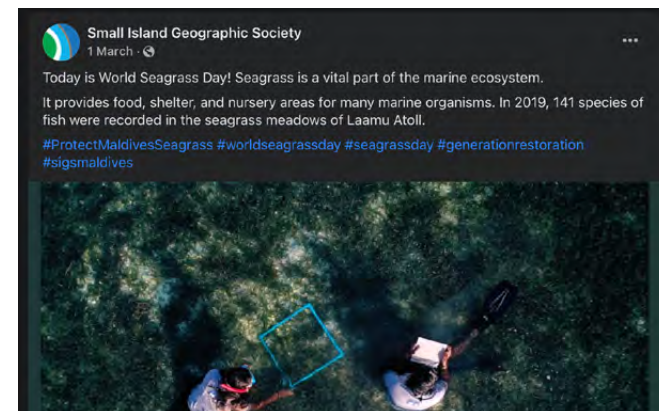
This year, to celebrate World Seagrass Day, MUI decided to reach out to all partners that have joined us on this journey, to share as many seagrass stories, photos, and videos as possible, with the aim of flooding local social media with seagrass! The Six Senses Laamu team provided templates, captions, and a media library for users to post. 23 posts using the #ProtectMaldivesSeagrass handle were uploaded, in addition to 30 World Seagrass Day stories which MUI reshared. This reached 1,782 people, with 115 interactions.



In addition, the team reached out to local press and an article was published discussing the importance of seagrass in Maldives.

The importance of seagrass meadows will only grow in the coming years, as we face the global challenge of climate change, and we rely more than ever on the natural carbon-converters, plants. Covering large expanses, seagrasses are key to this process, capturing carbon and burying it below the marine sediments, where it will be trapped for thousands, if not millions, of years. Because of this, we encourage our guests to post and share their experiences in the seagrass meadows, whether it's an enchanting encounter with a grazing sea turtle, a fever of 12 rays swimming under their villa, or simply watching the oxygen bubbles rising to the surface from the meadow.

A positive and supportive attitude towards Maldives seagrass protection from guests, local and global communities will aid their protection and help safeguard the whole ecosystem, and people who rely upon it. 🌊



OUR COMMUNITY GETTING BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY

After completing 100% booster vaccine dose coverage at the resort, in March the inter-island travel restriction was lifted for the first time in two years. This means that the team can now travel again to neighboring islands in Laamu and continue community-focused projects in person.

For the past few months, the Six Senses team has been working closely with neighboring island councils of Hithadhoo and Maamendhoo to strengthen and advance the waste management capacity in these islands' waste management centers. With the lift in travel restrictions, the team jumped on the first opportunity they could to see the waste management centers first-hand, guided by their respective island councils. The purpose of the visits were to identify the challenges the councils face when managing waste and formulate how we can work together to develop a long-term action plan which will tackle the waste management problems in the islands of Maamendhoo, Hithadhoo, and Kunahandhoo.

During these visits, the team also took the opportunity to visit Maamendhoo school to see the progress of the reading corner project (read more on the next page), and the mangrove forest on Hithadhoo island. This is the largest mangrove in Laamu atoll and is one of the six sites declared protected in Laamu in December 2021. 🌊



CELEBRATING WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day 2022 was celebrated at Six Senses Laamu through the launch of a new project by the resort and Laamu Fonadhoo Women Development Committee (WDC). On March 8th, 2022, members of the WDC were invited to the resort to sign a MoU with Six Senses Laamu for the "Reusable Bag Donation for All Households in Laamu Fonadhoo" project.

This project, which is funded by the Six Senses Laamu Sustainability Fund, will enable Laamu Fonadhoo WDC to make and distribute 750 reusable bags with the help of tailors from a local small business called Fair Green. These cloth bags will be distributed to every household in Laamu



Fonadhoo through a door-to-door educational campaign by the WDC where they will also raise awareness about the harm single-use plastic imposes on our fragile environment. In addition, Laamu Fonadhoo WDC will provide a vocational training session in a community forum on how to make reusable cloth bags, increasing the longevity of the campaign. 🌊

READING CORNERS

Another project which was funded through the Six Senses Laamu Sustainability Fund in March, was the building of Reading Corners in four classrooms of Laamu Maamendhoo School (pictured to the left). The aim of the project is to increase reading among the 54 primary level students in the school.

The goals of this project includes giving more opportunities for students to read, class-reading challenges and badge collecting competitions for reading and sharing their knowledge with others. The hope is that this project will not only help with literacy levels, but also build their curiosity and empower students to seek more knowledge about topics which interest them. 🌊



37 items were donated to Laamu's community by Six Senses Laamu Guests

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP ON ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION

On 24th March, MUI's Community Outreach Coordinator and members of the Maldives Resilient Reefs team, attended a multi-stakeholder workshop hosted by the Ministry of Environment's Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) project.

The workshop brought together key community figures from all islands in Laamu, including island council members, women development committee members, the National defense force, police, and other private sector representatives. The aim of the event was to raise awareness, increase community involvement and increase capacity in ecosystem conservation and management. The various speakers outlined ecosystem services and benefits in a local context, the current legal and institutional framework on ecosystem conservation, and shared case studies of protected area management from other parts of the Maldives. The workshop was concluded with a focus discussion activity to evaluate the participant's understanding of the topic.

It was great to see tremendous support shown by the participants for marine conservation and the interest everyone expressed to have well-managed protected areas in the atoll. A true testimony to the Laamu Atoll Hope Spot and the hope of its community. 🌊



THE MANTA TRUST



JINAAD'S FIRST DIVE IN LAAMU

Not long after joining the Manta Trust, Jinaad, the new Assistant Project Manager, had his first dive in Laamu at Fonadhoo Beyru, one of Laamu's most beautiful dive sites. He brought the manta luck along with him and was delighted to witness a manta ray on his very first dive in the atoll, which was also the first manta encounter from Fonadhoo Beyru this year.

Using the footage contributed from Deep Blue Diver's dive instructor Izaaz, Jinaad was able to identify the manta as MV-MA-2971, more commonly known as Charlotte. Charlotte is an adult female, who was last seen in December 2019, so the Manta Trust team were very excited to encounter her after more than 2 years! 🐙



MANTA MANIA AT KURETHI

In March, a time of the year where manta ray sightings are typically at their lowest, the Manta Trust team were amazed to receive a sighting report of seven manta rays on one dive! The submission came from a guest at Six Senses Laamu who sighted all seven mantas on the dive at Kurethi, a dive site along the south-western outer edge of Laamu Atoll. The Manta Trust team have started monitoring this site more regularly and have been deploying remote underwater time-lapse cameras at the manta ray cleaning station there.



To learn that seven mantas were there at one time proves the significance of this site for manta ray aggregations. This sighting submission also proves the value of citizen scientists; members of the public, including divers and snorkelers, who submit surveys to research organizations. The Manta Trust is very grateful to the resort guests who are passionate about taking part in their data collection process. 🐙

SIGHTINGS AT SIX SENSES

Following the theme of citizen science, the Manta Trust team have been receiving some very exciting and astonishing manta ray sightings from resort guests, right beside their villas!

In December 2021, a resort guest submitted a manta ray sighting from the end of Jetty A, which is the first line of water villas at the resort. In March, the team received another manta sighting from this same location. This area has never been a recognized manta aggregation area, so the team are amazed to hear of mantas coming so close to the resort.

The Manta Trust team plan to place one of their remote underwater time-lapse cameras at this location in the hopes of catching some passing manta rays. Stay tuned for updates next month! 🐙



3 remote underwater photography surveys with 132 hours recording time



36 guests taught about manta rays in evening presentations



11 islands in Laamu confirmed for participation in upcoming Manta Trust social science surveys



19 manta memos sent to guests from dives



BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION



CAPACITY BUILDING IN KUNAHANDHOO

With the easing of inter-island travel restrictions, the Blue Marine Foundation (Blue Marine) team were able to travel to the island of L. Kunahandho to conduct an education session with island council members. The aim of the session was to build awareness around climate change, marine protected areas, and fisheries management.

The event was very well received by island council members and there were informative and engaging discussions around how these issues will directly impact the Kunahandho community. This visit is part of a wider effort by the Blue Marine team to build awareness and marine environmental stewardship across Laamu Atoll. 🌊



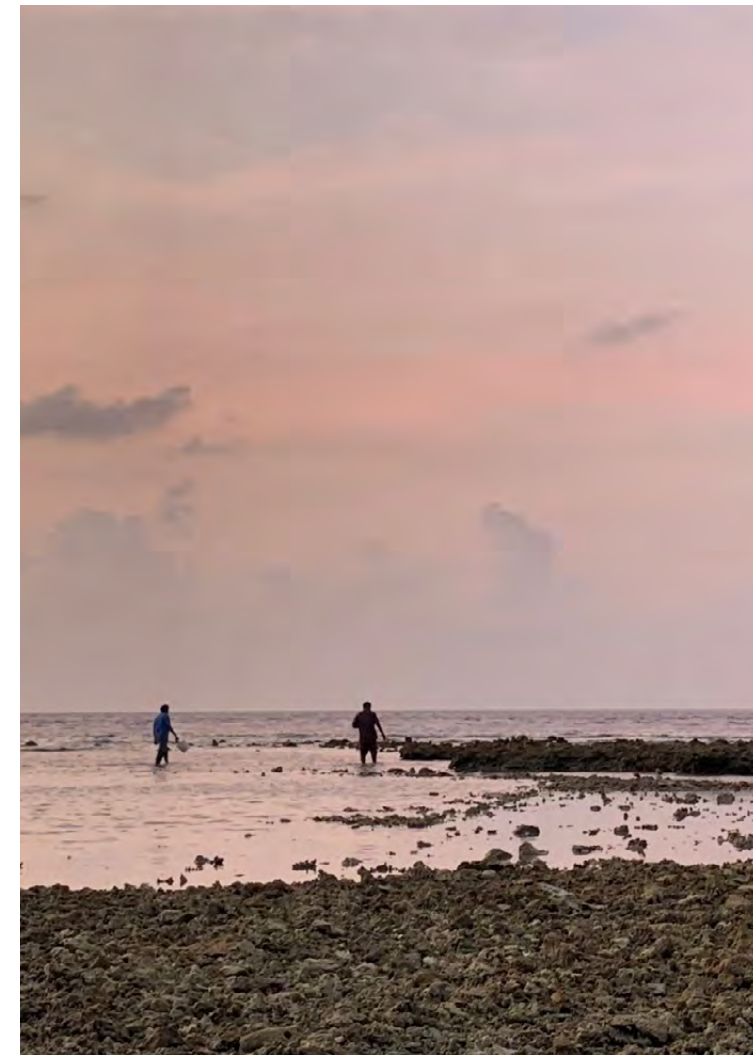
98 fish were measured and recorded during guest fishing trips



9 locals attended environmental education sessions



4 local citizen science volunteers were trained to be Open Water Divers



GLEANING SURVEYS

The Maldives Resilient Reef (MRR, Blue Marine Foundation's local affiliated NGO) also started a new fisheries survey in March to understand the invertebrate gleaning fishery of Laamu Atoll.

Gleaning is a fishing method used in shallow coastal, estuarine and freshwater waters or in habitats exposed during low tide. The research MRR is conducting focuses on Maabaidhoo and Gan islands, where paid interns have been trained to accompany gleaners to collect fishery data. This includes data such as the target species, fishing locations and weight of the catch during the full moon and new moon periods. The survey effort started during the full moon period in Mid-March in Maabaidhoo and will continue until June. The data collected from this research will be analyzed by a student from the University of Exeter to establish a baseline from which future changes of this fishery can be measured. 🌊

CERTIFYING MORE REEF CHECK ECO-DIVERS

In March, MRR conducted PADI Open Water Diver trainings for a second group of young people from Laamu Atoll as part of the 'Laamaseelu Farudhun' (meaning Exemplary Citizen) coral reef citizen science program.

This group consisted of four participants, two from Thundi and two from Mukurimagu neighborhoods of Laamu Gan Island, including Aishath Naajy - the first girl to take part in these trainings. These four trained open water divers, as well as the four trained earlier in the year, will take part in a Reef Check Eco-Diver training in May to learn how to monitor coral reefs of Laamu Atoll. 🌊





OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

RECORDING NEST TEMPERATURES

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) team in Laamu started an exciting new project recently, the first study of temperature and humidity data during incubation of nests!

Our Turtle Biologist deployed the Tinytag temperature logger into the first new nests of the year in January, where it slowly collected the change in temperature and humidity once a day. The nests where the loggers were deployed hatched this month, meaning the ORP team were able to download their first set of data from this project.

This data is critical in understanding the changing population dynamic of the turtles born into Laamu atoll, as sea turtle sex is determined by the temperature of the nest during incubation period. This is a long-term study, and the temperature loggers will be deployed with new nests again to collect as much data as possible throughout the year. 🌊



MEETING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

In March, ORP met with Laamu Hithadhoo's council and Women Development Committee (WDC) to introduce their project's goals in Laamu. During this meeting, ORP shared their key findings from Laamu's photo-ID research, especially for the reefs around Hithadhoo.

Hithadhoo's reefs are critical resting habitats for the endangered Green sea turtles, and important foraging habitats for critically endangered Hawksbills turtles. ORP's research of the area for the past four years shows a healthy, thriving population. ORP is also working on developing an extensive habitat use study of Hithadhoo's reefs to understand the sea turtles in the area better. Laamu atoll has the 2nd largest database of green sea turtles in the country thanks to the habitats around Hithadhoo Corner. 🌊



TURTLE OF THE MONTH

VENUS

Venus (HK3887) is a juvenile hawksbill that was first encountered in March 2019 - making this her third year on record! Venus is from Fushi Kandhu, a channel opening in the north-east wall of Laamu. They've been sighted close to Fushi Kandhu channel corner, and nowadays they like to hang around on the opposite end of the channel at Maabaidhoo Corner.

Hawksbills like Venus can be surprisingly graceful in the strongest of currents, spending the majority of their lifetime on reefs such as this one. Coral reef habitats provide hawksbills with their preferred food, as their diet consists of a wide variety ranging from soft corals to small crustaceans. So if you see a hawksbill swimming effortlessly, don't make the mistake of thinking it's calm underwater - the hawksbills are just great swimmers! 🌊



72 encounters of turtles were recorded, including 1 from a guest



4 never seen before turtles were identified



150 hours of nestwatch were done by volunteers from the Six Senses Laamu staff force



91 hatchlings started their lives at Six Senses Laamu

OUR HOME

WORLD RECYCLING DAY

On 18th March 2022, the Earth Lab team at Six Senses Laamu was delighted to celebrate World Recycling Day with fellow hosts at the resort.

The event started with a short presentation by MUI's Community Outreach Coordinator, who highlighted the global issues of waste and encouraged hosts to think resourcefully when it comes to the goods around us. Then, the group were invited to different stations around Earth Lab where the team showed them how to upcycle old towels into plant pots, used wax into new candles and discarded wine bottles into a drinking glass and a lamp.

Whilst the Earth Lab team conduct these activities on a regular basis to minimise waste at the resort, this was the first time they invited hosts to give it a go. After the success of the day, the Earth Lab team have decided to incorporate these activities into the [Reconnect with Others](#) day-long itinerary the resort offers to guests.



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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