

# BLUE & GREEN LAAMU

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

NOVEMBER 2022

*This Christmas Tree worm was captured  
by Anooof during the Ministry of Tourism  
underwater photo competition.*



SIX SENSES

LAAMU



MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu

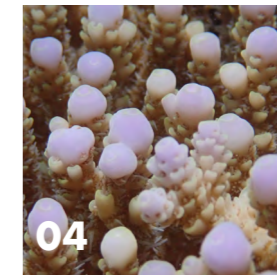


This shot of a green turtle, taken by Jasmine Corbett, was in the top ten shots in MUI's Underwater Photography Competition.



# WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 04 SIX SENSES CONSERVATION
- 08 THE MANTA TRUST
- 10 BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION
- 14 THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT
- 16 OUR COMMUNITY
- 18 OUR HOME



## THE BIG STUFF



**95** megafauna surveys were conducted by the MUI and DBD teams



**746** sharks were sighted



**290** rays were sighted



**262** turtles were sighted

## OUR EDUCATION



**1181** moments of education were shared with guests



**231** moments of education were shared with hosts



**133** moments of education were shared with the community



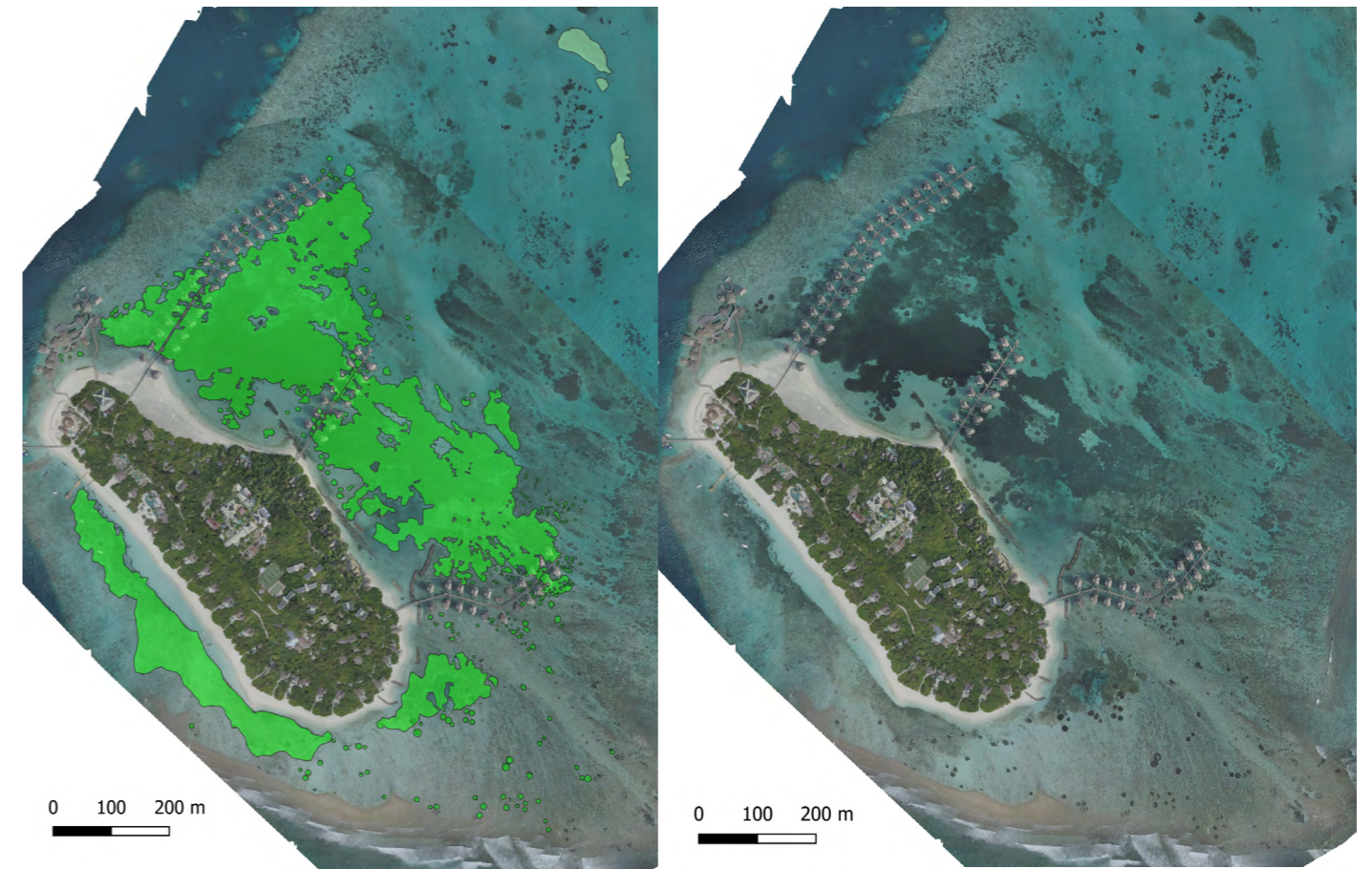
# SIX SENSES CONSERVATION

## OUR SEAGRASS IS FLOURISHING!

Seagrass is a vital habitat that acts as shelter and as a nursery ground for an approximate one fifth of the 25 world's largest fisheries. This means that not only are they important habitats for species such as green sea turtles which eat seagrass, but also for commercial species such as grouper, snapper and jacks. Seagrass meadows also act as a stabilizer for the sediment that forms the Maldivian Atolls and can help to protect from coastal erosion. In addition to all of these benefits, seagrass meadows also have a hidden super-power! Seagrass meadows can sequester carbon up to an estimated 35 x faster than tropical rainforests. This means they can take in carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and bury this carbon up to 4m under the sediment so that it is locked away for 1000s of years if undisturbed.

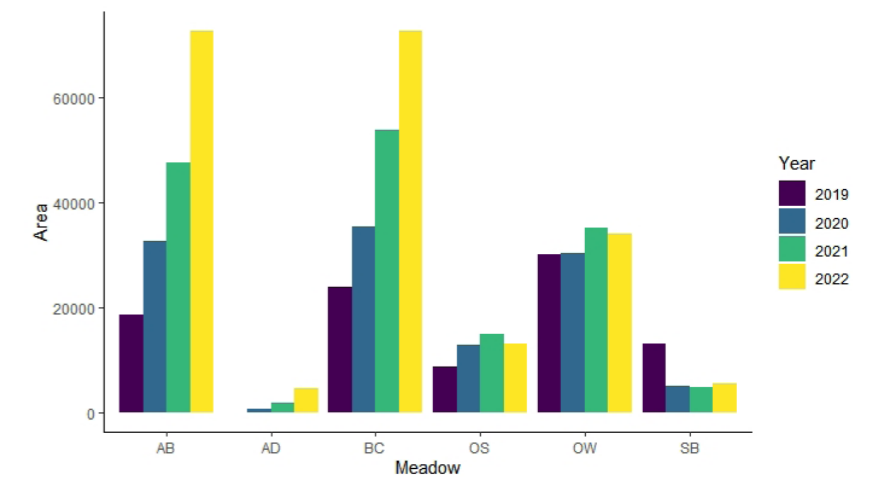


*This shot of our seagrass meadows was captured by Alex Mustard.*



During this process they also release large amounts of oxygen and help to mitigate ocean acidification. Ocean acidification threatens organisms with a calcium carbonate shell or skeleton such as coral and is a growing problem due to the large amounts of carbon dioxide being absorbed by the ocean. Seagrass helps to reduce ocean acidification by taking in this excess carbon dioxide and helps to protect the coral reef.

We are now at the end of our 4th year of seagrass monitoring and for 2022, Athif, a student from Maldives National University, completed the field work and submitted his thesis on the distribution and biodiversity of seagrass around Olhuveli Island. With his work we can now deepen our understanding of how seagrass meadows change in distribution over time and what natural and human factors affect its growth. We are hoping to progress this research further by investigating the capacity for seagrass meadows around Laamu to act as blue carbon habitats and to stabilize sediment.



**6** different types of seagrass identified in our meadows

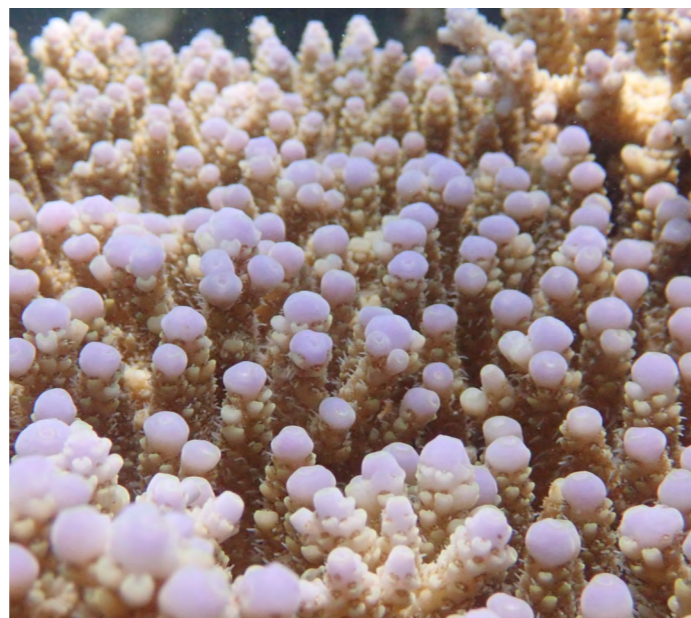




## THE MUI TEAM IS CORAL DISEASE TRAINED

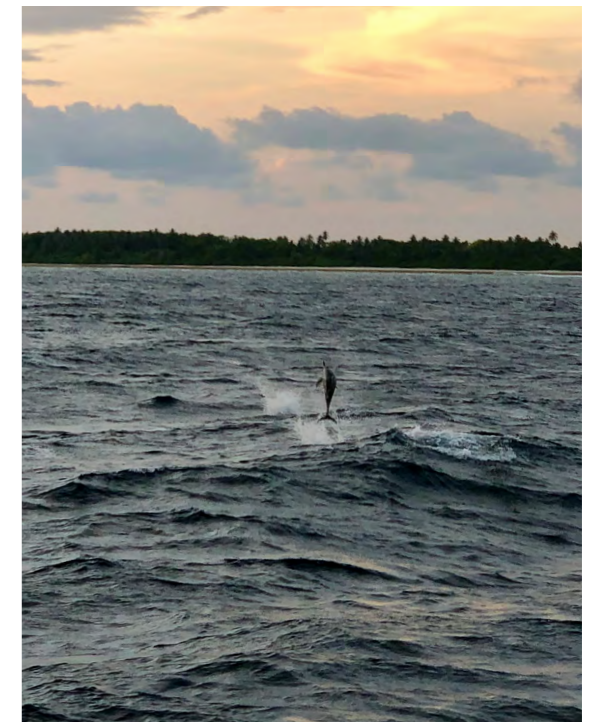
Monitoring coral diseases in natural reef ecosystems is vital in order to further our understanding of the pathogens that cause these diseases, and the effects that they can have on ecosystems. Currently there is a lack of data for many diseases, despite their potential to cause as much damage as mass bleaching events. An example of how much impact coral diseases can have is displayed in some Caribbean reefs, where around 83% coral species host at least one disease and they have seen large outbreaks of some of these diseases. These outbreaks have been rising in frequency and it is important to monitor reefs worldwide for changes in disease levels.

Dr Simone Montano, a coral disease specialist from the University of Milano-Bicocca and the MarHE center, gave the MUI team and the Deep Blue Divers two very insightful coral disease workshops. During these trainings Simone shared information on what to look out for whilst checking if coral damage has arisen from predation or disease, how to distinguish between different diseases, and what impacts these diseases can have on coral reef ecosystems. The team is now equipped to monitor disease levels on the reefs around Laamu in order to recognize a rise in any disease amongst the coral community. Being able to recognize an outbreak early allows us to identify the causes and put appropriate mitigation in place to limit spread. The team is excited to continue our work with Simone in order to progress our understanding of coral diseases in the Maldives. 🌊

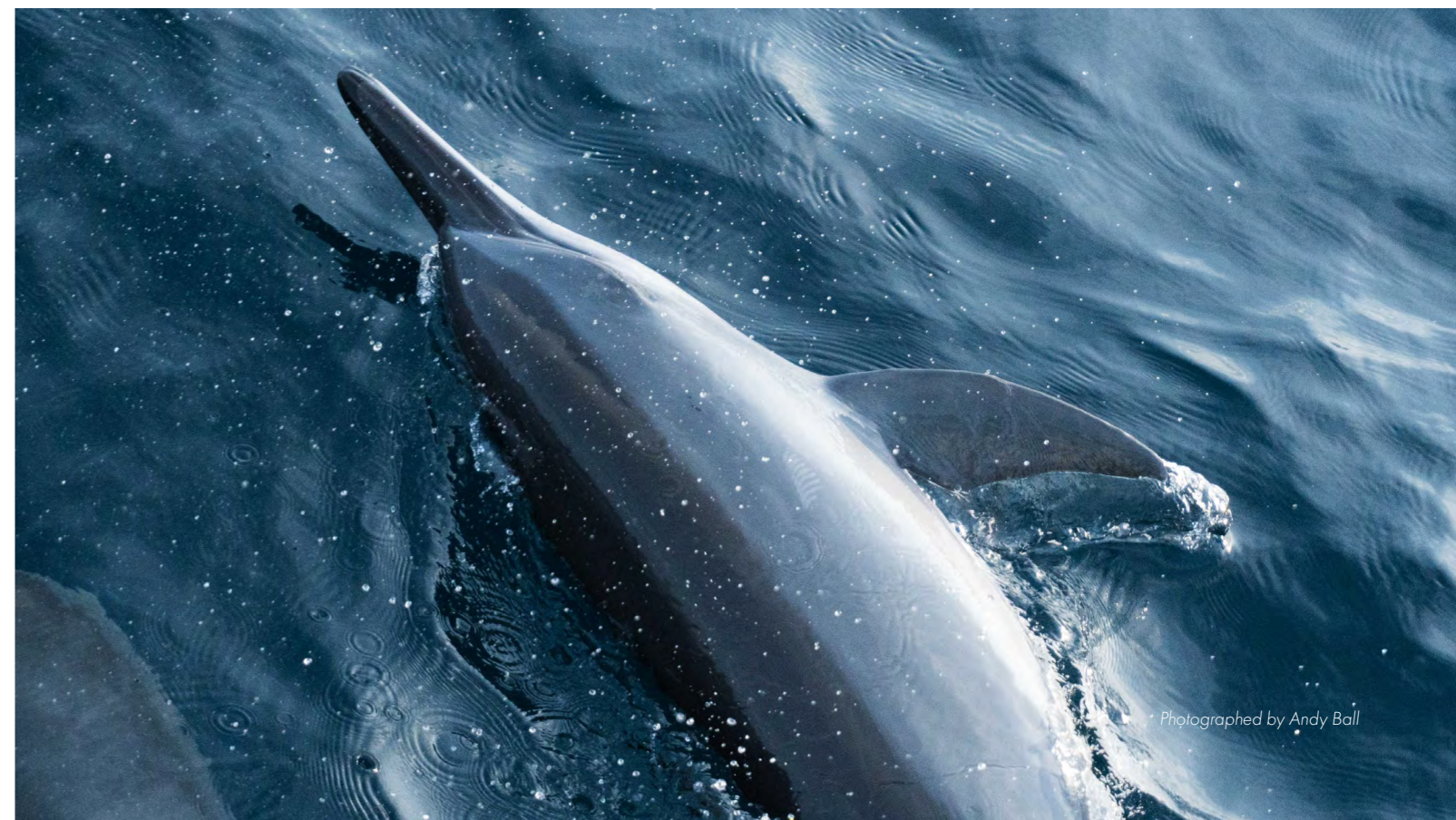


## DOLPHIN WATCHING WITH A VIEW

Another year is coming to an end and we have done a lot of activities with the guests. One of these activities that has always been a highlight for many guests is the Sunset Dolphin Cruise. In December MUI team members joined 25 separate dolphin cruises, educating and informing guests on the dolphins they were seeing and on conservation around the atoll. Laamu is lucky to have a healthy and highly active dolphin population around the whole atoll, this month dolphins were seen on 70% of the dolphin cruises with guests. The great thing about our sunset dolphin cruises, is that even on the rare occasion dolphins aren't spotted, guests and staff are still usually treated to a magical Laamu Sunset. With a total encounter time of 295 minutes, 158 individual guests saw more than 1105 Dolphins last month! 3 different species of dolphin were seen throughout November, with the regulars being Spinner dolphins, and Bottlenose dolphins, and a few very lucky guests and staff got to encounter a rare pod of Short Finned Pilot whales on the way back from a dive on the outside of the atoll. Besides the playful dolphins and the beautiful sunset, Laamu had other rare treats to offer this month, such as a manta on the surface and blue marlin jumping out from the water too! What a beautiful month to see some dolphins. 🌊



**227** guests joined on megafauna surveys



Photographed by Andy Ball

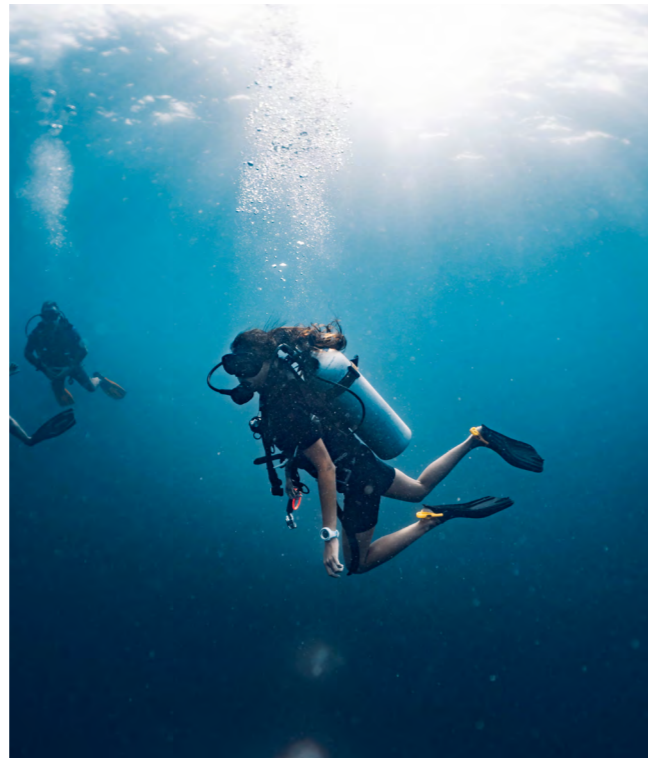


# THE MANTA TRUST



## VOYAGEFOX ON A VOYAGE TO FIND MANTA RAYS

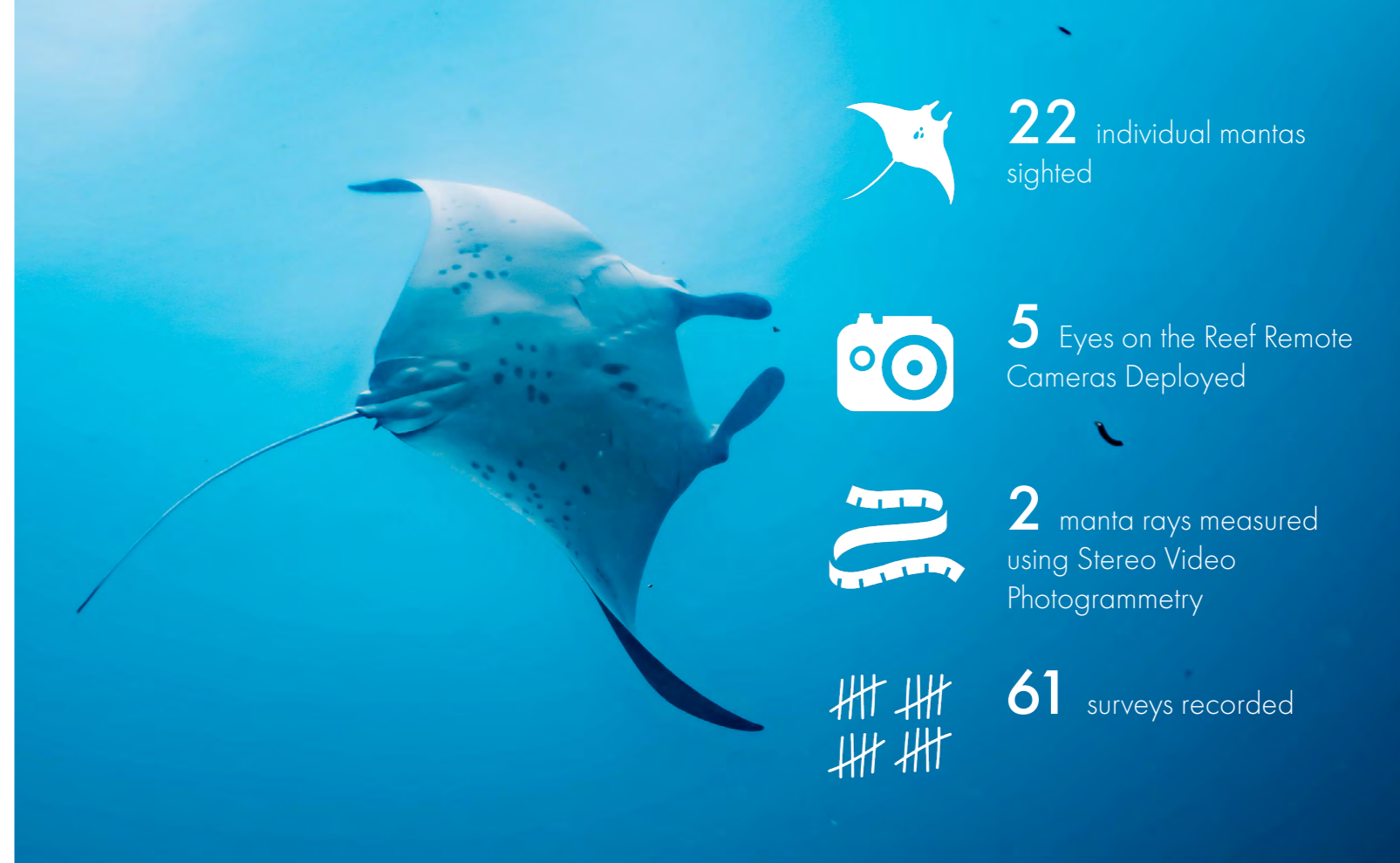
This month the Manta Trust team in Laamu was excited to welcome travel influencer and blogger Nathalie Aron a.k.a. Voyagefox at Six Senses Laamu. Nathalie and her partner participated in the new PADI Manta Specialty Course hosted and developed by Manta Trust and Deep Blue Divers at Six Senses Laamu. Within the course, they learned about manta ray research, conservation, and the importance of protecting these beautiful animals. Apart from listening to a special manta ray presentation, doing a knowledge review and diving at manta ray sites, they were also given a number of different tasks to complete underwater when diving with manta rays: From identifying gender, maturity and health of a manta ray to taking Photo-IDs of the manta rays' unique spot pattern – Nathalie managed it all! She really gave everything to get that photo of a manta's belly just at the end of the second dive when we didn't think we would see a manta ray anymore. Luckily Nathalie spotted it in time to end her course on a high! Both of them are now officially certified PADI manta divers. The course is such a great learning opportunity for guests that want to get to know our gentle giants a little bit better. 🌊



**2** newly certified Manta Specialty PADI Divers



**34** dives at manta sites



**22** individual mantas sighted



**5** Eyes on the Reef Remote Cameras Deployed



**2** manta rays measured using Stereo Video Photogrammetry



**61** surveys recorded

## LAAMU SPOTTED IN LAAMU

One of our local manta rays called "Laamu" put on a little show for some of our lucky guests who went diving with Manta Trust and Deep Blue Divers at our study site "Fushi Kanduu". The dive team often call this spot "Fishy Kanduu" because, when the conditions are right, this dive site feels like swimming in an aquarium – schools of fusiliers, snapper, hunting tunas and jacks, followed by a shiver of sharks (yes, a school of sharks is called a shiver). This time our divers were lucky to be greeted by our manta ray "Laamu", who took us by surprise having approached us from the back of the group. Laamu is a curious but not very often seen adult male, that measures 270cm from wingtip to wingtip. The team have first sighted him in 2015, but have only seen him twice this year on dives so it was extra special to see him again before the end of the year. And as you can see in the photo, he made sure that our project manager Miri had an easy job getting the belly shot, e.g. a photo of a manta ray's unique spot pattern that is used to identify individual manta rays. 🌊



**9** out of 13 dives at Fushi Kanduu had manta rays





BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

# BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

## MAAVAH SNORKELING PROGRAM

This month, Blue Marine Foundation and Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR) conducted a snorkeling program for 21 students, parents and teachers from Maavah School. It was a fun and engaging afternoon, where participants learned about snorkeling skills, ocean safety and important marine life before being taken on a guided snorkel around the uninhabited island of Kashiguraidhoo. The event was an excellent opportunity for all participants to learn how to use the snorkeling equipment donated to the school by Blueyou in partnership with Manta Trust. 11 of the 13 schools in Laamu Atoll have now taken part, with snorkel programs at the remaining two schools planned over the next few months. 🌊



6 adults taught to snorkel



15 students taught how to snorkel



## MAAVAH CLIMATE EDUCATION SESSION

The Blue Marine and MRR team also conducted a climate awareness session for 6 members of Maavah Island Council and Women's Development Committee. The session focused on the climate crisis, marine protected areas and sustainable fisheries, as well as Blue Marine and MRR's ongoing work in Laamu Atoll. Local policymakers were also presented with Maavah-relevant findings from the resource-use survey conducted in 2021. Through these sessions, Blue Marine and MRR hope to build and improve connections with Laamu Atoll local policymakers and work together towards ensuring resilient islands. 🌊



6 local council and WDC attendees





# FISH OF THE MONTH WAHOO!

In November, local fishers landed many wahoo (*Acanthocybium solandri*) through the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa program. Wahoo are a highly migratory subtropical species which can be found throughout the global ocean. Feeding primarily on smaller fishes and invertebrates, wahoo are thought to be solitary wanderers of the ocean, perhaps driven to Laamu's shallower waters by nearshore nutrient upwellings fuelling high abundances of prey fish. Caught by Laamaseelu Masveriyaa fishers using sustainable pelagic trolling fishing, wahoo are prized by resort chefs due to their high quality flesh and are a guest favourite at 'Zen', Six Senses Laamu's in-house Japanese restaurant. 🌊



## CONGRATULATIONS SHAHA!

This month, MRR chairperson Shaha Hashim was awarded the 'leadership excellence in the field of climate change and environment' prize at the Professional and Careers Women awards 2022 hosted by Women in Management – Maldives. Blue Marine and MRR are immensely proud of Shaha and are continually inspired by her passion and commitment to conserving Maldivian marine ecosystems for future generations. 🌊

 54 Wahoo sustainably caught







OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

# THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

## NESTING NEVER STOPS

As we come towards to the end of 2022, the green turtles are still busy nesting on Six Senses Laamu's beaches. There has been a total of 19 nests so far, which is a slight drop from the 26 nests laid in 2021 but significantly more than the 10 laid in 2019. This fluctuation in nest numbers is due to the fact that nesting females will only make the long migration to lay their eggs once every 2-3 years! So most of the turtles nesting this year are not the same as the ones nesting last year!

The last three nests were presumably laid by the same turtle, a female named Cookie (GR941) who was first seen nesting on island in June 2018 and then again in March 2021! Green turtles typically lay 3-5 times in a season with a 10-12 day gap in between each nest, so we are able to roughly predict when she will come up to lay. Our team encountered her this time while patrolling the beach at night and were able to get some great ID photos of her while nesting. By analysing the scale patterns on her face, the ORP team on island were able to match her with photos that were taken when she last nested in 2018 and 2021.

It's so great to see one of our regular females still coming back to nest on the island, highlighting the importance of Six Senses Laamu as a key nesting site in the atoll. We hope to continue seeing Cookie nest on our beach for many more years to come! 🌊



New nest on Olhuveli Beach



3 nests laid

## TURTLE ON THE SPOTLIGHT

### HK3814 Ugg

Give a warm welcome to Ugg (HK3813)! Ugg is our friendly neighbourhood hawksbill who was first spotted in 2017 and has since been encountered over 80 times! Ugg mostly likes to hang around Laama Faru Haa, a popular snorkel spot near the resort that is abundant in corals and sea sponges – a hawksbill's favourite food. It's no wonder that their always encountered there.



As juveniles, hawksbills and other turtle species will often stay around the same patch of reef for many years to feed and grow. They're very slow maturing creatures and can spend between 15-40 years foraging in the same location until they reach adulthood. Like most people, these animals like their comfort zones and will rarely venture out to other foraging locations once they've found one they like.

However, our little Ugg is a bit of an explorer! This juvenile has also been sighted in our house reef and at Hiithadhoo Corner, a popular dive site about 4 km away. There is still little we know about the foraging behaviours of sea turtles at their earlier life stages. There are theories that they shift to different locations when they move into adulthood, so Laama Faru Haa may just be a "kindergarden" for Ugg. Ugg is still considered small for a hawksbill turtle, so we expect to continue seeing this juvenile for many more years to come. 🌊



774 turtles in Laamu



24 turtle surveys



Julian and Sarah conducting a survey on Gaadhoo



# OUR COMMUNITY

## MUI AT MNU FAHI FURUSATHU

On 8th November 2022, the MUI team and Six Senses Laamu's human resource team participated in Maldives National University's Fahi Furusathu - Job festival. Organized by the Maldives National University (MNU) Gan campus in Laamu, the purpose of the job festival was to provide a platform for students and potential employers to meet and connect talent to fulfill future-ready jobs, internships, apprenticeships, etc.

The two-day festival held on Gan island had several organizations, from government institutions to private sector businesses, participating in this festival. The Six Senses Laamu team set up a stall to represent the tourism industry at the festival, showcasing the vast array of opportunities available in



**48** guest donations received



**49** guest donation distributed



the Maldives tourism sector. In addition, the team highlighted the work of the MUI team, emphasizing the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism for the atoll and the whole country. The festival was a great success, the team networked and shared MUI's work with other stakeholders and inspired college students and other job seekers to pursue a career in tourism in the Maldives. 🌊



**49** guest donation distributed





# OUR HOME SUSTAINABLE OPERATION AUDIT

“Sustainable” is not something that we “do”, it is who we are as a company. It is at the core of our culture, our vision, our values and our Six Senses brand. However, Sustainability requires a continuous process of improvement, fostering a growth mindset amongst team leaders and hosts. Therefore, The Sustainability Guidelines for Operations are mandatory for all properties under the Six Senses brand. They establish the minimums of operational performance for sustainability. Annually, Six Senses Corporate office visit Six Senses properties all around the globe to conduct Sustainable Audits.

In the month November 2022, Six Senses Laamu team was delighted to welcome the Director of Sustainability in Cooperate Office, Jennifer Klar for the annual sustainable audit at Six Senses Laamu. From a week-long audit, she has carefully looked into the departmental performances

according to the sustainable operation guidelines. Jen’s evaluation was a tremendous support for the team leaders as it would be the base for the action plan 2023. The company’s ethos of sustainability ensures that future generations can enjoy them with Six Senses for years to come. 🌿



**14,779** Six Senses glass water bottles were bottled



**147** guests participated in Earth Lab activities



## PLANT POT DONATION

In the month of November 2022, Earth Lab team partnered up with the Nature Club of Laamu Maamendhoo School to make plant pots out of the discarded towels from the laundry operation. The aim of the activity was to turn the operation wastes from Six Senses Laamu to something useful again through the students of L.Maamendhoo school. As a result of the event the Nature Club conducted a fund-raising event at Six Senses Laamu by selling the plant pots for our hosts. The Nature Club would be using this fund for their educational trips within Laamu Atoll. 🌿



**20** kgs of towels were sent to Laamu Maanedhoo School



**15** plant pots



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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