

BLUE & GREEN LAAMU

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

SEPTEMBER 2022

*Duna the Manta captured
by Jasmine Corbett.*



SIX SENSES
LAAMU



MUI

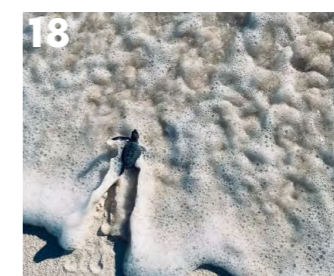
MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu



This shot was captured by Marteyne van Well, Six Senses Regional General Manager.

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THE BIG STUFF



100 megafauna surveys were conducted by the MUI and DBD teams



449 sharks were sighted



195 rays were sighted



195 turtles were sighted

OUR EDUCATION



1022 moments of education were shared with guests



158 moments of education were shared with hosts



463 moments of education were shared with the community

SIX SENSES CONSERVATION

CORAL RECRUITMENT STUDY

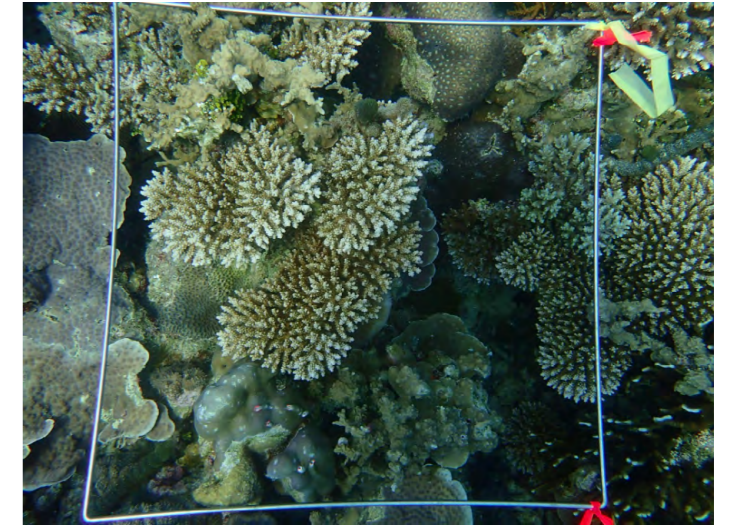
Rhiannon, our interning PhD student from the University of Exeter, has been very busy this month conducting surveys on different sites around the atoll. Rhiannon is looking at the number of new corals that are growing, otherwise known as coral recruitment, across different sites in Laamu Atoll to see if the reefs in Laamu are recovering following bleaching events that have occurred in the past. This month Rhiannon has more than doubled the number of surveys completed compared to August, with 20 surveys in 10 different sites across inner, outer, channel and faru reef types.

So far, we are seeing a lot of new coral growth on many of the sites visited. Rhiannon has found that the place with the most new corals are the inner reefs, such as our beautiful house reef at just 5m depth. Around 40%



of the coral colonies identified across Laamu atoll are recruits (corals that are smaller than 5cm) with branching Acropora being the most common species. Recruitment appears to be lowest at 15m for inner, outer and faru reefs but higher in channel reefs.

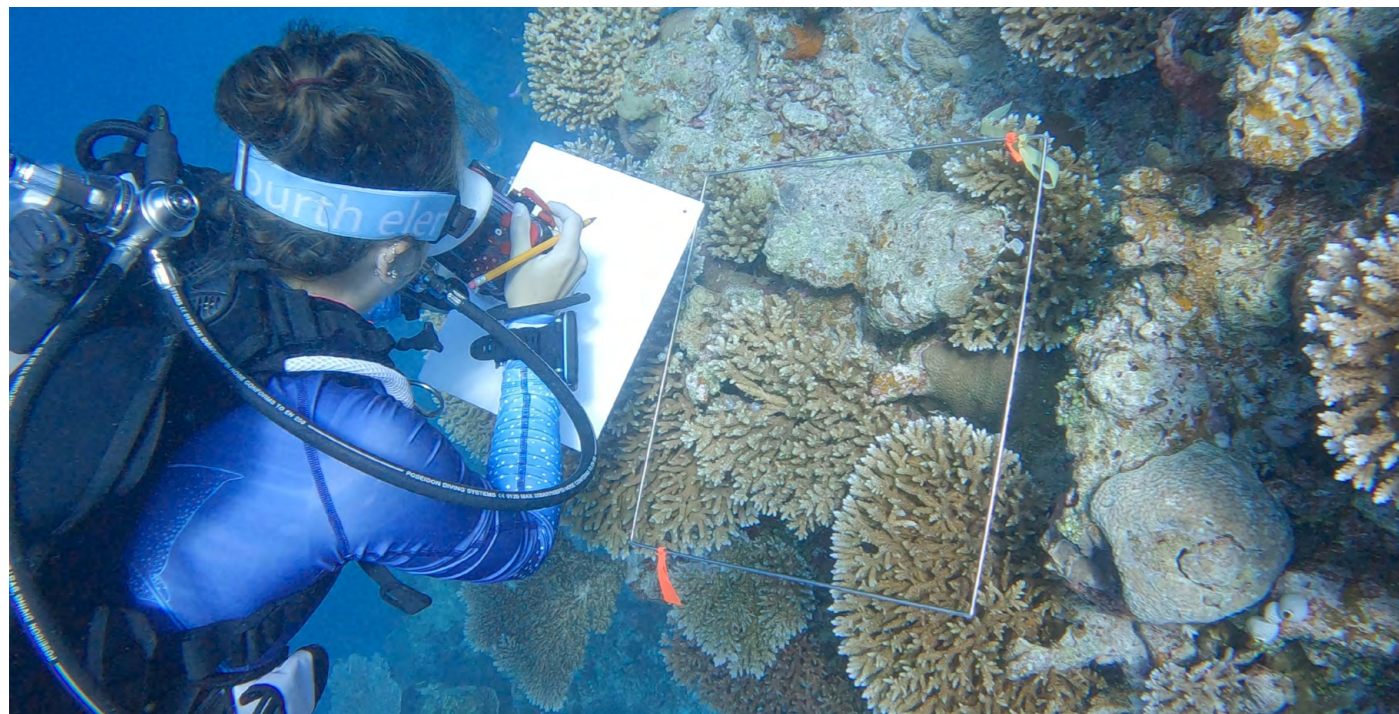
With this research, we are starting to understand the growth patterns of corals around Laamu, which is essential to understanding their health and recovery. Knowing that recruitment is high on many reefs is great news for the corals of Laamu. High coral recruitment is an indicator of recovering and healthy reefs, meaning that many of the reefs in Laamu are doing really well and will hopefully be more protected against bleaching events in the future. These results are very promising and continue to show us why Laamu is a hope spot and why it is important to keep protecting our incredibly important habitats. 🌊



20 surveys done
in September



19.3 hours
underwater in
September



480 quadrats
studied



10 sites
surveyed

THE MANTA TRUST



WORLD MANTA DAY TURNED WORLD MANTA WEEK AT LAAMU!

World Manta Day fell on the 17th of this month. But instead of just celebrating for one day, our Manta Trust team in Laamu decided to spread manta events throughout the week! The week started off with a manta themed sunset cocktail event on our sunset beach which featured a special manta ray station. Guests were given the opportunity to experience underwater encounters with mantas through our VR headset whilst our team were providing the most recent updates about the manta rays of Laamu! All attendees were also entered into a lucky draw where one fortunate winner was given the special opportunity to name the newest identified manta ray individual in Laamu!



On World Manta Day itself, the Maldives Underwater Initiative and Six Senses Laamu celebrated by joining local community members at Maabaidhoo island for a clean-up event to celebrate World Clean-up Day which happened to fall on the same day. After a successful clean-up, where Six Senses volunteers and a number of the MUI team along with the community gathered a total of 700 kg of waste, our team set up another manta station to share the manta love with the local community. The VR experience was popular with kids, parents, and elders alike; many had never seen a manta ray before and were keen to watch the footage multiple times!




On our island, our resort guests set out on a dive with one of our MT researchers to Fushi Kandu, one of our manta sighting spots to celebrate the occasion. Unfortunately, no mantas made an appearance that day, but perhaps they were too busy having their own World Manta Day celebrations elsewhere. Every dive is a survey effort and the data goes into MT's database regardless if mantas are seen or not. All these dives are crucial for us to gain a better understanding of these gentle giants.



During this week, we also took the opportunity to take kids out snorkeling. While it was not feasible to take the children snorkeling with mantas as most mantas in Laamu are sighted deeper while scuba diving, the kids still loved the snorkel and it was the first snorkel experience for many of the 35 kids that we took out!

To conclude manta week, the MT team gave our guests a presentation that highlighted the research that is being conducted here in Laamu in an effort to better understand manta ray populations in the Maldives and Laamu. The work Manta Trust are doing is pivotal for conservation efforts of manta rays and our marine ecosystems. It has been a fantastic week to be able to share the manta knowledge and inspire others to love mantas and the ocean as much as we do! 🌊



 **3** guest activities and 2 community activities to highlight World Manta Day through the week!



MANTA SIGHTINGS AT FONADHOO BEYRU

Fonadhoo Beyru is an outside reef dive site that has an extended reef, separated from its initial sloping reef by a big sandy bottom. The extended reef is full of life and populated with various hard corals.

However, it sits a little deeper, ranging around 20-28m's and thus not always frequented by the Deep Blue Divers and our team as this is a site for more experienced certified divers. However, more recently, mantas have been regularly spotted on this site when our team or Deep Blue Divers visit. This has led us to believe that there is a potential cleaning station that sits at around 24m at this site. 🐠



23 individual mantas were sighted on 15 sighting occasions this month



3 of the individuals we encountered was their first appearance in 2022!



11 Manta Rays were estimated to have been captured on Manta Trusts' first Eyes On the Reef deployment to Fonadhoo Beyru.



BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

EXPLORING THE TWILIGHT ZONE OF THE MALDIVES OCEAN

This month, Blue Marines Maldives Programme Manager, Shaha Hashim participated in the joint Nekton and Maldivian Government's Maldives Deep Sea Expedition from 7-14 September 2022. Shaha was selected as one of the [ten Maldivian 'aquanauts'](#) leading first descents in high-tech submersibles to explore Maldives' unknown deep ocean.

The knowledge exchange expedition Shaha was on was carried out on a live-aboard diving / research vessel and included marine scientists from Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and the UK who shadowed the mothership 'R/V Odyssey' as the team surveyed sites on Vaavu and Laamu Atolls. The team gained experience



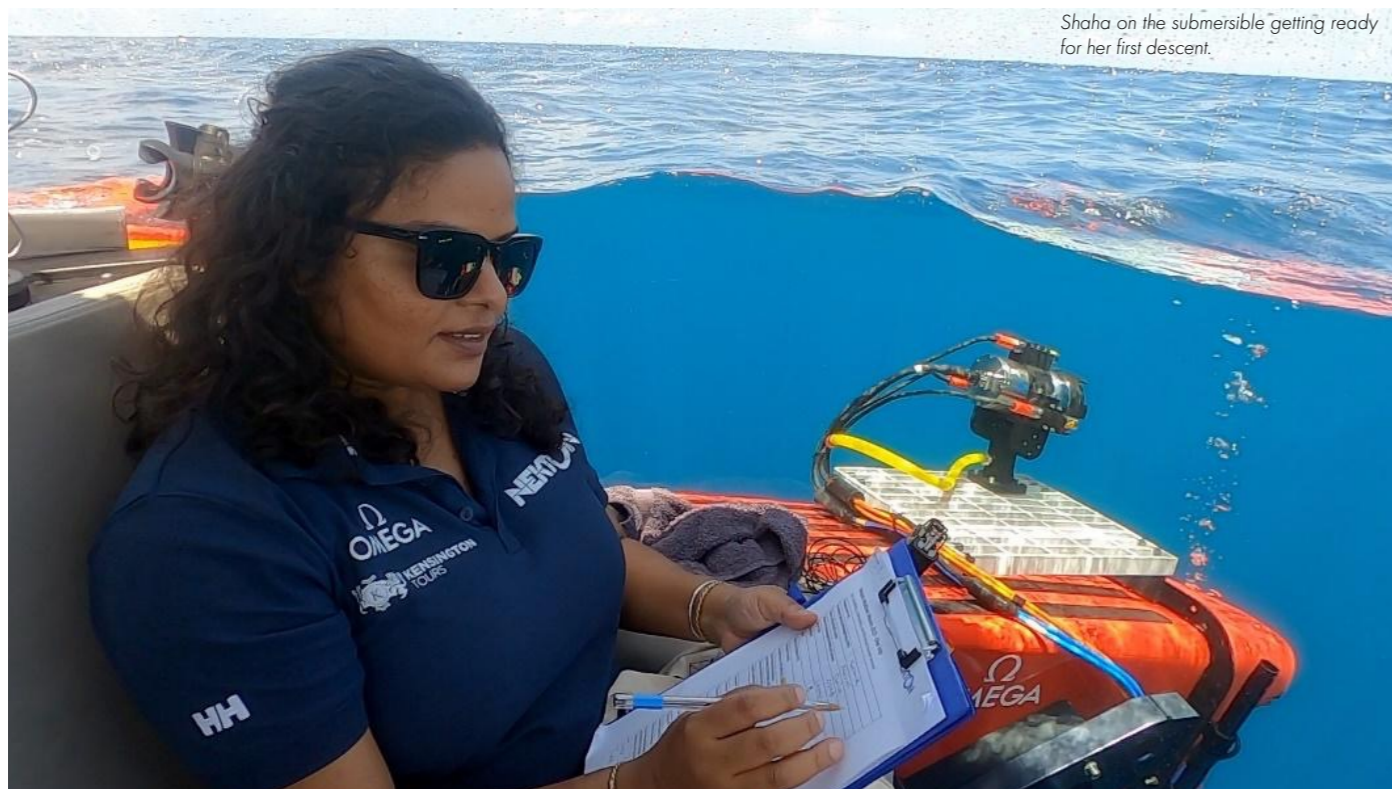
490 meters down



10 Maldivian aquanauts



Shaha with the first Maldivian aquanauts Shafiya Naeem and Farah Amjad who led the first descent of the mission.



Shaha on the submersible getting ready for her first descent.

on submersible survey transects, Nueston nets, BRUVs (Baited Remote Underwater Video system), CTD (Conductivity, Temperature and Depth), DNA sequencing and several other scientific technologies. Shaha shared that the most memorable experience was getting to see fish and octocoral species at the 490m depth she and her colleagues surveyed, which she had never before seen in shallow waters.

This expedition will generate scientific observations that would support the establishment of a baseline of marine life and the state of the ocean while contributing to improved ocean governance, public engagement and knowledge sharing. 🌊



Shaha with some of the knowledge exchange expedition team members, Dr Asha Devas from Sri Lanka and Molly Rivers from the UK.



SECOND LAAMASEELU MASVERIYAA FISHER MEETING

This September, the second quarterly meeting of the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa program was successfully carried out by Blue Marine and MRR team. These meetings are a vital tool to discuss any changes brought to the program in the past quarter and highlight fisher perspectives and ideas while strengthening the bond between the fishermen and the resort. This ensures that Six Senses Laamu can create a market for sustainably caught fish in Laamu Atoll, through facilitating reef fishing methods which have a minimal impact upon local coral reef ecosystems. A total of 14 fishers attended the meeting from the nearby islands of Maamendhoo, Hithadhoo, Kunahandhoo and Fonadhoo.

In the meeting an overview of the past quarter was shared with the fishermen in an open discussion format. Constructive conversations were had around difficulties that fishers have and ways to ensure fish supply was enough to meet the resort operational demands in bad weather days.

After a short tea and coffee break the meeting resumed by celebrating the three fishers who accrued the most amount of sustainability points in the past quarter. Afterwards, minor

operational changes introduced to the program were discussed. The most exciting program change, which was also well received by fishermen, was the reduction of the threshold of sustainability points required to receive the premium fisherman bonus from 18 to 15 points. The fisher bonus gives the fishers an increase reward after each month if they have gained enough points, points are accrued by supplying sustainably caught fish to the resort.

With the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa Education program coming to fruition Blue Marine and MRR hope to increase awareness of sustainable fisheries and their importance in Laamu atoll and throughout the Maldives.



 **207** fish sold to the resort

 **14** fishers attended the meeting

KUNAHANDHOO SCHOOL SNORKEL CAMP

In September, MRR and Blue Marine team conducted a snorkelling camp for 25 students, teachers and parents of Laamu Kunahandhoo School. The ocean guardians learnt crucial snorkelling and in-water safety skills before going on a guided snorkel on a coral reef near their island. Events like this are especially beneficial for islands like Kunahandhoo that does not have a designated, convenient swimming area or easy reef access.

One of the best things about these snorkelling camps is that students are able to go and enjoy the beauty of the marine life in their backyard reefs along with their parents and teachers. Some of the participants have never been snorkelling on a reef all their lives! These activities are always highlights for the team and value of these activities are truly defined, when these participants share how magical their first-time experience was with us after the snorkels. 10 of the 13 schools in the atoll have now participated in these Eku Eky (meaning "Better Together" in the local language of Dhivehi) snorkel camps run for the schools by Blue Marine and MMR, with the final 3 schools' snorkel camp's planned for the upcoming months.



 **25** students participated





**OLIVE RIDLEY
PROJECT**

THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

TURTLEY TAKEN BY SURPRISE

July's storm surges and beach erosion meant there was little space for turtles to nest at our normal nesting beach here on Olhuveli island- and low chances that the nests would make it even if they did lay! Nesting females this month were noted to go further and further inland looking for a spot to nest, this was emphasized by team occasionally discovering, tracks leading all the way up to villas in the morning.

However, one turtle was found leaving the beach by our Nestwatch volunteers on a rainy day. Luckily, the volunteers managed to get ID-photographs of the turtle's face! We then identified that it was G 191, a nesting turtle from 2019 returning again this year. This is the second time she was encountered in 2022, following an attempt in June. However, due to the heavy rain washing away signs of the nesting attempt, the team was unable to locate her nest and had recorded her attempt as a failed one.

To our surprise, the baby turtles emerged 54 days later at dawn. Some of the hatchlings had become disoriented by the beach lights and pool lights at the villa, and instead of heading towards the ocean, had headed inland. Due to their small size, baby hatchlings can also get easily blinded and need time to recover.

Luckily, the guests that woke up to find the hatchlings crawling over their front yard alerted the Sea Turtle Biologist, and with the help of the MUI team were able to rescue and release 30 live hatchlings back to the beach safely. The team watched over the hatchlings as they finally made their journey to the sea, and hope that they survive the odds despite the initial chaos of their first hour. 🌊



3 guests had hatching experience



30 hatchlings released

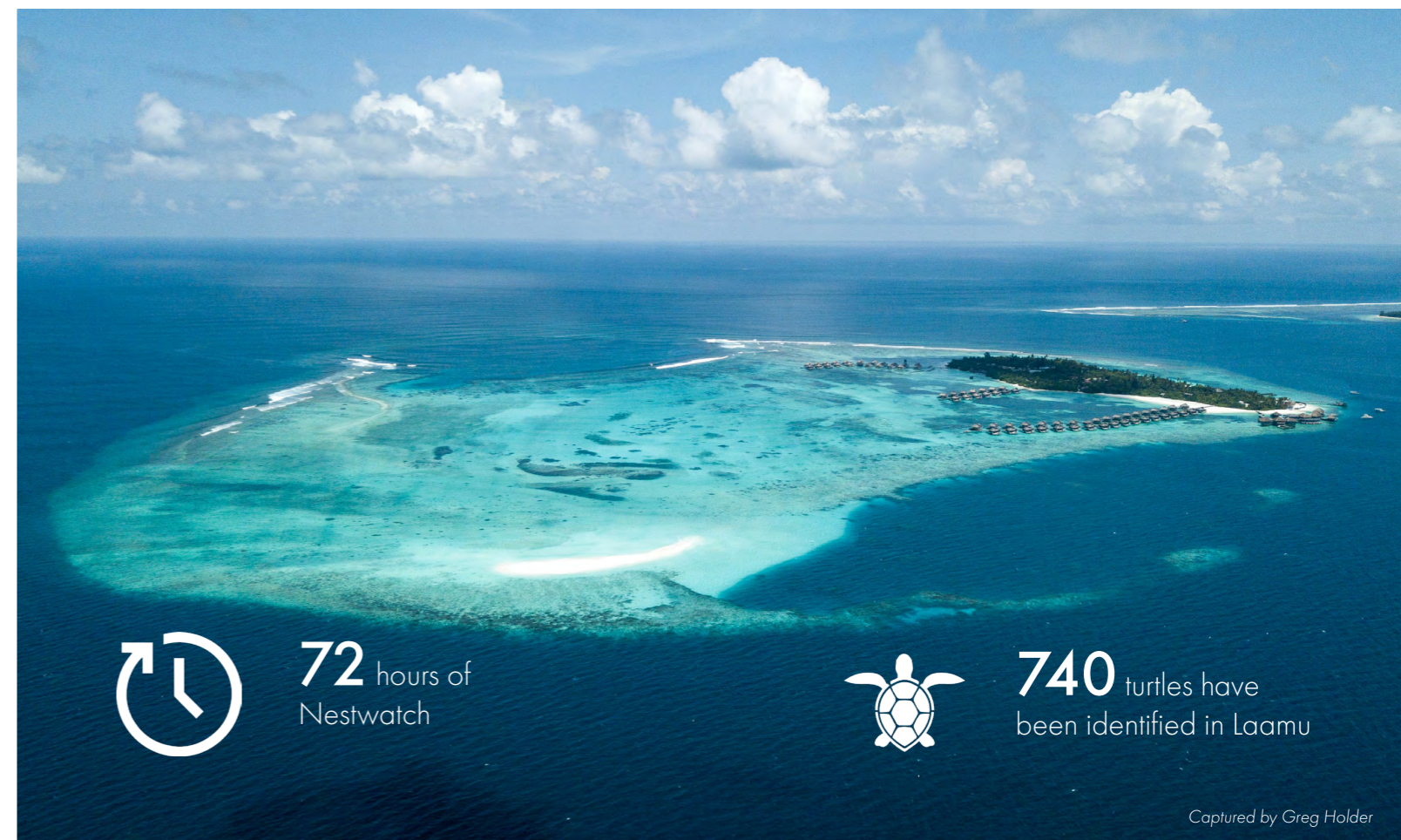
INTRODUCING SARAH

Sarah Ibrahim has joined the team as the new intern!

Sarah is an avid ocean-lover, with both diving and freediving qualifications under her belt. She is enthusiastic about sea turtles and learning more about marine life, and how to research them.

Sarah has a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, and is looking to study in the conservation field for her Masters. She grew up in the Maldives, but has also spent time in the UK and Australia. Sarah's passion marine conservation was sparked during the pandemic, as she got the chance to snorkel and dive in the ocean more.

In Laamu, Sarah will be supporting with nesting on island, conducting photo-ID research dives whenever she can, and also supporting the monitoring of the nesting beach on L. Gaadhoo. She will also be participating in historical knowledge survey with former Gadhoo residents. 🌊



72 hours of Nestwatch



740 turtles have been identified in Laamu

#GREENTURTLESGAADHOO: MEETING PRESIDENT SOLIH

L. Gaadhoo's nesting beach continues to be one with high nesting activity. However, despite being designated as a Marine Protected Area in December 2021 it continues to have high amounts of poaching from people. The poaching on the island is at an all time high since ORP began collecting data in April 2018, with 75.47% of nests poached since January.

This is an increase from 69.56% of poaching in 2021.

Work is underway by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology to formulate a management plan for Gaadhoo's nesting beach, along with the other areas designated as MPAs in the atoll. In the meantime, ORP has appealed to the government for support in establishing a consistent monitoring program on the island with a Beach Guardian, in partnership with EPA and AgroNat, the company that currently has ownership of the island. The EPA, ORP and AgroNat, alongside the government, have now created a work plan on next steps to establish monitoring on the island in the near future.

The goal of the monitoring plan is to deter poaching with the presence of people, to cover up signs of nesting, to record all nesting and poaching activity, and to work with stakeholders to educate and enforce existing laws protecting turtles. 🌊



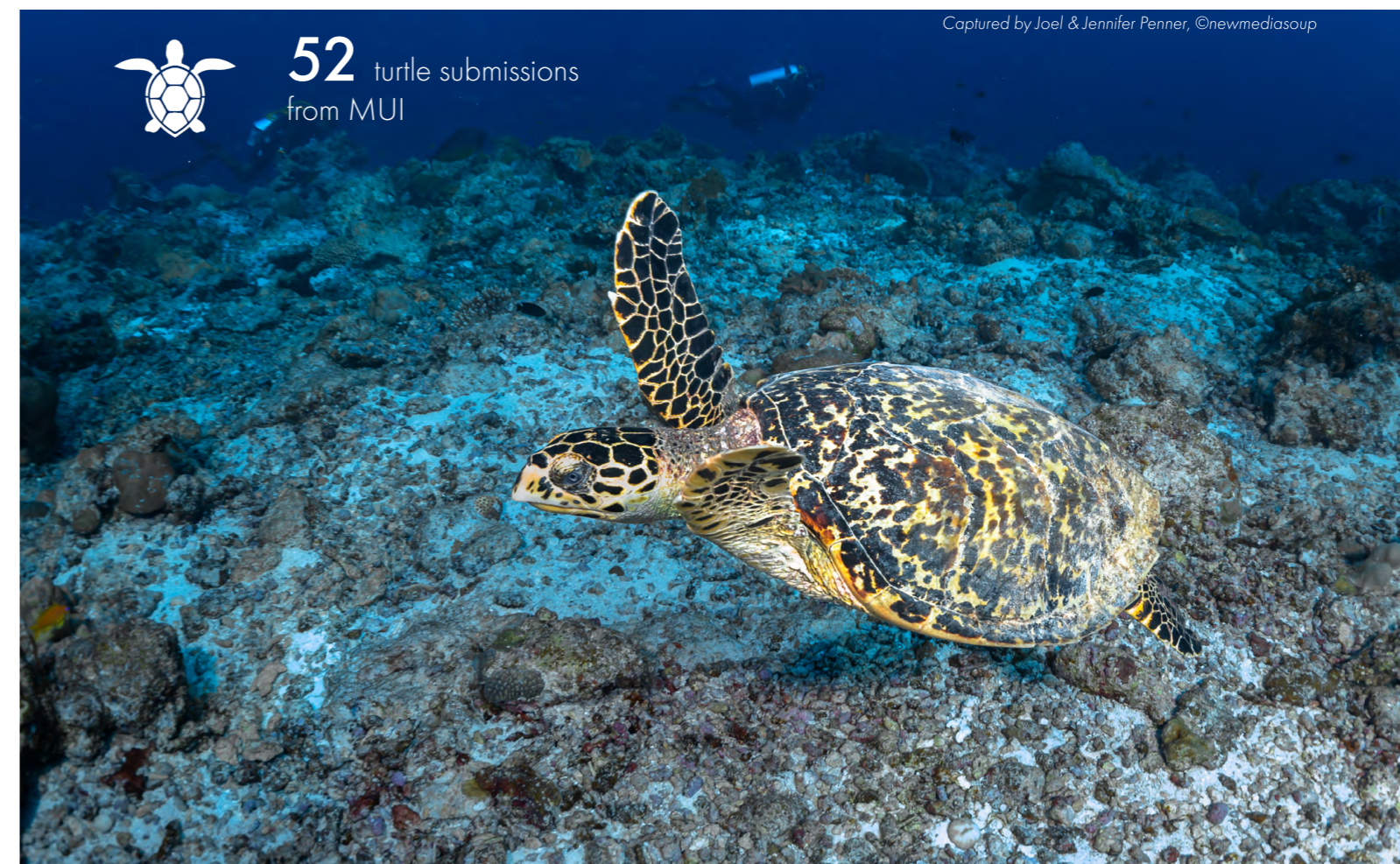
TURTLE ON THE SPOTLIGHT HK3655 AVA

Ava

Ava (HK3655) is a juvenile hawksbill turtle first sighted in April 2017. Ava resides in Laama Faru Haa, a shallow submerged coral reef structure close to the resort. She is mostly seen foraging on some soft corals and sponges, and has sometimes been seen fraternizing with the other hawksbills in the area.

Ava has been sighted at least 77 times so far!

Hawksbill turtles like Ava help us keep the balance within the coral reef ecosystem. As they eat off the algae, soft coral & sponges, they create more space for baby corals to settle down and help to grow a healthier reef. We hope that the reef habitats continue to be a thriving habitat so Ava can grow into an adult! 🌊



OUR COMMUNITY

GIVING FOR GOOD MONTH

SEPTEMBER 2022

September is a special month for All IHG properties. At Six Senses Laamu, we dedicated the whole month to 'Giving for Good' by joining thousands of colleagues across the globe doing good through gestures, big and small, making a difference in our Laamu community.

We collaborated with 9 different organizations in the atoll and beyond to celebrate the month. The activities organized were a great success! 50 participants and 239 community

members took part in the activities. Approximately 990 kg of trash was removed from our fragile environment, and 126 items from guest donations were distributed to three neighboring schools. In addition, 53 students and 13 teachers were provided with snorkeling lessons, and 34 students visited Six Senses Laamu on an educational trip to learn about responsible and sustainable operations and career opportunities. A total of 11 hours of education and raising awareness were conducted. 🌿

MANGROVE CLEAN UP

The Giving for Good Month started with the Hithadhoo mangrove cleanup, one of six recently declared protected areas for its ecological significance in Laamu atoll. 15 hosts from Six Senses Laamu and 13 community members collectively intercepted ~80 kg of segregated waste from the largest mangrove



80 kg of segregated waste

system in Laamu. The community participation and desire to conserve their natural environment was inspirational and set the mood for the rest of the 'Giving for Good' activities planned. 🌿



GUEST DONATION DISTRIBUTION

At Six Senses Laamu, guests can donate items of their choice to the local schools to strengthen the effort to make Laamu plastic free and phase out single-use plastic. As for the second Giving for Good activity, a team of 10 hosts traveled to three neighboring schools in Hithadhoo, Maamendhoo, and Kunahandhooand, to donate 126 items of donation received in the past three months. The team was delighted to facilitate donated items such as snorkel sets, reusable bags, reusable bottles, and stationaries to the school students. A huge thank you to the various guests who donated these items during their visit to Six Senses Laamu. 🌿



126 items of donation to 3 neighboring schools



WORLD CLEAN UP DAY



734 kg of trash was removed



World Manta Day coincides with World Clean-up Day on September 17 - both international celebration days align with our ethos. The team visited Maabaidhoo, a northern island community in Laamu atoll, to celebrate the day. Six Senses Laamu and partner NGOs joined the Island Council and Women Development Committee of Maabaidhoo to run an island-wide cleanup. The main focus of the cleanup was a recent nationally protected wetland called Maabaidhoo Kaoru, an open mangrove well known for its lush scenic beauty and wide array of fauna sighted around the area. Through the collective effort of 12 hosts and 70 community members, 734 kg of trash was removed and sent to the island management center for segregation and disposal.

The successful cleanup was followed by a Manta Ray education session by our partner NGO, Manta Trust. *(Read more about the Manta Day celebration on page 6)*

After a whole morning of cleanup and Manta Ray fun under the tropical sun, it was time to cool down and go for a snorkel. Using the snorkel gear donated in 2019 and 2020 by our partners, Blue you and Manta Trust, the team took 35 students on a snorkel to explore the vibrant coral reef and lush seagrass meadows of Maabaidhoo. Participants were thrilled to encounter all sorts of marine life, including critically endangered hawksbill turtles, species of rays, and other kinds of marine life. For many younger participants, it was their first time snorkeling and seeing what lay beneath the surface. All the participants walked away thankful, with big smiles, and urged the MUI team to return soon for a second session. 🌊



MAAMENDHOO SCHOOL SNORKEL SESSION

The team is on a mission to inspire and empower the next generation of marine stewards in Laamu atoll. The team was delighted to accommodate the request from Maamendhoo School to take students aged 7 to 9 years on a boat snorkel adventure. For many students, it was their first time joining a boat snorkel, and the excitement on the boat was palpable.



18 students taken snorkeling



18 students and 13 teachers snorkeled on the Laama Faru Haa, a remote reef in the middle of the Laamu atoll, well known among divers, snorkelers, and fishers for its rich biodiversity. Most students' highlight from the snorkel was encountering several megafaunas, such as the critically endangered Hawksbill turtle and near-threatened Blacktip reef sharks.

the help from the Maldives Police Service for ensuring students' safety in these activities. 🌊



13 teachers taken snorkeling

The safety of the students is the top priority when it comes to in-water events and activities. The MUI team is grateful for





ISLAND CLEAN UP & CLIMATE ACTION AWARENESS

Earlier this year, Six Senses Laamu launched the Local Island Excursion, an hour-long guided tour of the beautiful island of Kunahandhoo. Since then, Six Senses Laamu's relationship with the community of Kunahandhoo has strengthened and resulted in several collaborations between the Island council, Women Development Committee, and Kunahandhoo Boduberu (Maldives traditional music) group. One activity from this partnership is an island-wide cleanup and climate action awareness session for the community members as part of 'Giving for Good' month. A total of 30 community members joined 9 hosts from Six Senses Laamu for the cleanup, intercepting ~ 176 kg of trash from the island's coasts, which undergoes seasonal erosion, flooding, and storm surges during south-west (rainy) monsoon.

The cleanup was paired with a Climate Action Awareness session. Laisha, our earth lab intern from Kunahandhoo, shared what climate change means for small island communities like Kunahandhoo and insight into climate action and adaptation activities that are locally relevant to build resilient communities in the face of climate change. The MUI team is currently discussing with Kunahandhoo Women's Development Committee to find solutions for the stressing coastal issues in Kunahandhoo.



176 kg of trash collected



RESORT FIELD TRIPS

Tourism is the main industry in the Maldives, directly contributing 21% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Over 27000 Maldivians work in this ever-expanding industry with the clear need to prioritize recruitment from the local communities. With tourism studies integrated into the school system and curriculum, Six Senses Laamu offers field trips for students to immerse and get hands-on experience in resort operations. The resort field trips focus on helping participants discover the world of opportunities that awaits them in the tourism industry and show them how tourism can be sustainable and responsible.

Six Senses Laamu hosted the first resort field trip for 35 students and 4 teachers from Mohamed Jamaluddin School in Fuvahmulah island, Gnaviyani atoll, the nearest atoll to the equator and the first atoll in the Southern Hemisphere of the Maldives. More school resort field trips are planned for October, and the updates will be covered in next month's edition of Blue and Green.



35 students visited Six Senses Laamu



GIVING FOR GOOD NUMBERS

The whole Month of September was a great month for community engagement and interactions. The team is inspired by the community to collaborate more to work towards the community goals to ensure our communities in Laamu are inclusive, aware, and resilient. The high community participation in the 'Giving for Good' activities is a testimony of the desire and passion the Laamu community has for environmental preservation and protection. This truly makes Laamu a 'Hope Spot,' as recognized by Mission Blue last year. 🌊



239 Community participation and Engagement



50 hosts participated



990 kg of waste collected



11 hours of teaching



126 items donated

SIX SENSES LAAMU BECOMES A CANDIDATE OECDM

For the past 11 years, Six Senses Laamu has been operating responsible and sustainable tourism on the beautiful island of Olhuvelu island, in the Laamu Atoll. Through collaboration with partner NGOs, Manta Trust, Olive Ridley Project (ORP), and Blue Marine foundation, the team has been studying the coastal ecosystems of Laamu and working with the Laamu community to set baselines, raise awareness, and inform policymakers. This year-on-year work has led to the designation of the Laamu Atoll as one of the planet's Hope Spots by the international non-profit organization Mission Blue. Moreover, the research findings were instrumental in declaring the six marine protected areas eco-rich and naturally unique sites in Laamu atoll by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology in December 2021.

The reef system of Six Senses Laamu is among the most extensively and routinely researched reef systems in the atoll. The MUI team conducts monthly and annual research to assess health and plan conservation measures and management. For several years the Six Senses Laamu house reef has been a voluntary protected site to act as a highly biodiverse area that benefits the environment, communities, and businesses across the atoll.

On September 13, 2022, the reef system of Six Senses Laamu received official recognition as a candidate for Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECDMs) by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Technology.

OECDMs are a new conservation approach adopted at the 14th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2018. OECDMs are recognized to achieve conservation objectives through other management measures.

The work of the MUI team in Laamu atoll is an excellent example of an OECDM. Currently, the MUI team is developing a management plan and ecological survey reports to become an officially recognized OECDM. 🌊



OUR HOME

COCONUT DAY CELEBRATION

On September 2, World Coconut Day was celebrated at Earth lab. Coconut trees are arguably the most sustainable plants, as all parts of the plant can be utilized for different purposes - a true symbol of zero waste. Coconuts play a significant role in Maldivian culture and are celebrated as the national plant. Even the national emblem consists of a coconut palm.

To communicate and demonstrate the many uses of the coconuts in the Maldives to hosts and guests, a team of 8 Kunahandhoo Women Development Committee (WDC) members were invited to the resort. During the event, hosts and guests were invited to partake in activities that showed



how to weave palm leaves to make thatch, use coconut shells to make crafts, coconut husk fibers to make coir rope, and midrib of palm leaves to make brooms, locally known as Iloshi Fathi. Boduberu (traditional Maldivian drums), made out of coconut trunks, added beats to the event while everyone enjoyed the fresh coconuts.

25 guests and 15 hosts from different departments attended the coconut day celebration organized in collaboration with the WDC and Kunahandhoo Boduberu group. 🌴



 15 hosts attended



 16 local community members attended

 25 guests attended

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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