THE CYCLONE

ISSUE 4 - JAN 2026 THE MANTA TRUST

CONTENTS.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to Issue 4 of *Cyclone Magazine*. Our biggest issue yet explores resilience — of manta and devil rays navigating vast and changing oceans, and of the people and communities working to protect them under challenging conditions. From grassroots conservation in Myanmar to global policy victories for mobulids, we highlight the many forms conservation can take, both in and beyond the water.

In *Species Spotlight*, we explore the oceanic manta ray, uncovering new research on how far and deep these gentle giants travel. Our feature stories take you to Myanmar, where our newest Affiliate Project is building conservation alongside coastal communities, across the Maldives, where 20 years of research and education shape manta protection, and onto the global stage, where science and collaboration delivered historic CITES protections for manta and devil rays.

Along the way, we share breathtaking images in *Manta Moments*, celebrate the passion of our Cyclone members, and highlight how your support drives real conservation impact. Each story reminds us that protecting mantas and devil rays depends on people — their knowledge, commitment, and collaboration.

Thank you for being part of the Cyclone. With your support, we remain hopeful, determined, and inspired to safeguard these incredible creatures wherever their journeys take them.

With warm regards,
Jasmine Corbett
Media & Communications Manager, Manta Trust

© Guy Stevens

Species Spotlight

In each issue, we spotlight a different species of manta or devil ray, exploring fascinating facts and the latest research that reveals their unique behaviours, habitats, and conservation challenges. Each feature offers fresh insights into the remarkable diversity within this family of ocean giants. Through these in-depth explorations, we aim to enhance understanding, celebrate the extraordinary traits of these species, and highlight the crucial efforts dedicated to their protection. Join us as we uncover the wonders of manta and devil rays and the vital research that drives their conservation forward.

The oceanic manta ray (*Mobula birostris*) is the largest species of ray on the planet, renowned for its grace and wide-ranging movements across tropical and subtropical oceans. In our latest study, we tagged 24 giant mantas in Raja Ampat (Indonesia), Tumbes (Peru), and near Whangaroa (New Zealand) to better understand their movements and behaviour.

We discovered that these rays can dive to extraordinary depths — over 1,200 metres — far deeper than previously thought. The deepest and most frequent dives occurred off New Zealand, where mantas routinely descended beyond 500 metres before returning to the surface and travelling vast distances in the following days.

These dives are unlikely to be for feeding or avoiding predators. Instead, they may allow mantas to gather environmental signals, including changes in the Earth's magnetic field, oxygen levels, temperature, and light, helping them navigate across the featureless open ocean.

These findings highlight the oceanic manta ray's remarkable ability to explore the deep sea and underline the importance of protecting the vast, poorly understood habitats they rely on. Our study reinforces the need for conservation efforts to safeguard *Mobula birostris* across its global range.

Oceanic Manta Ray
Mobula birostris

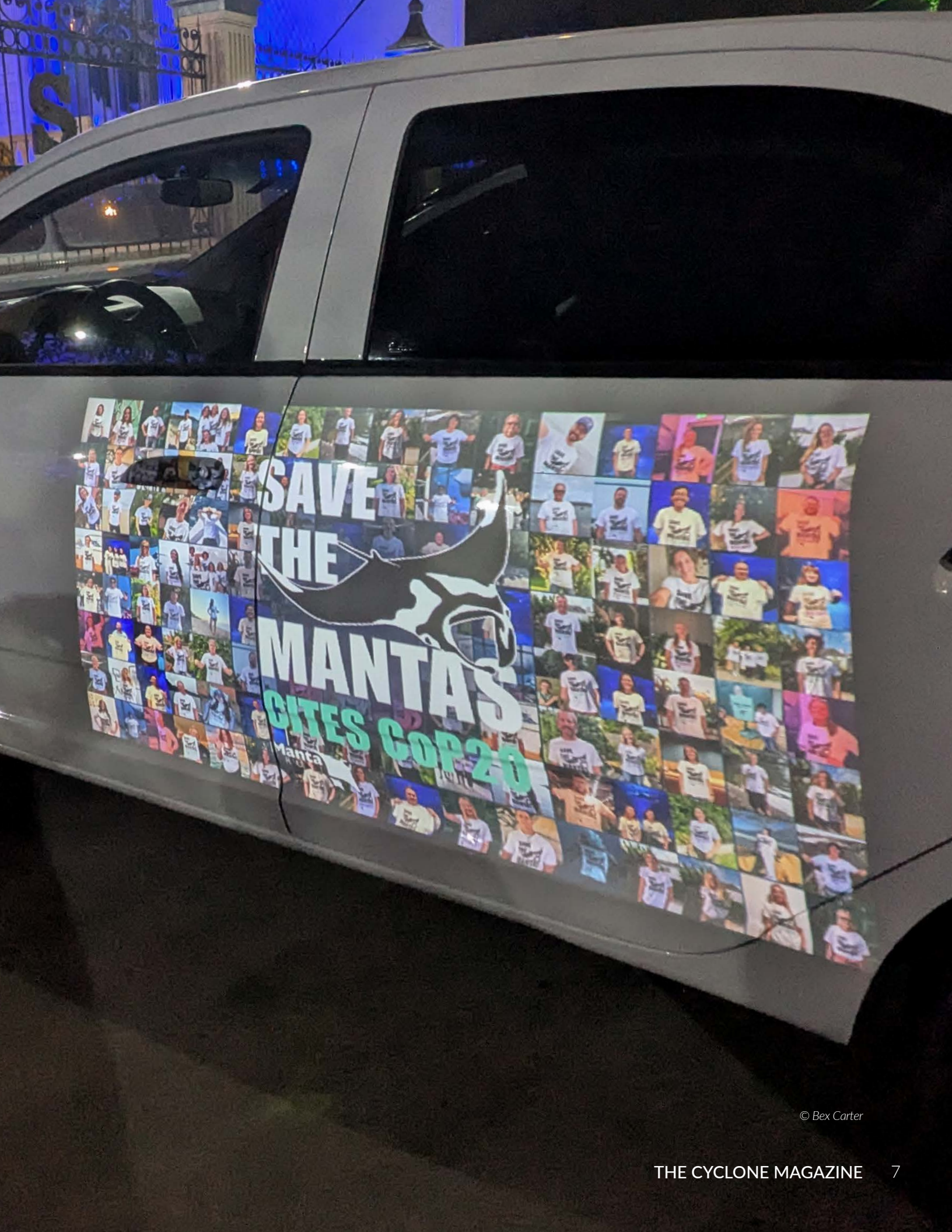
A Historic Win
For Manta and Devil Rays

From Science to Global Protection

In November last year, we had a historic win for manta and devil rays (collectively mobulids) when they were all listed on Appendix I of CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – granting them the strongest international protection from commercial trade.

It sounds impressive, but if you don't work in conservation policy, you might be wondering what on earth it actually means. Well, CITES is an international agreement established in 1975 to stop the unsustainable exploitation of wild animals and plants through global trade, ensuring species don't go extinct from over-harvesting, by regulating trade with permits. Today, CITES has 185 Member Parties (States and regional economic integration organisations) from around the world, and can be a powerful conservation tool.

Tigers, Asian elephants and humpback whales were among the first species listed in the 70s. Unfortunately, gaining protections through CITES for commercial species of fish, including sharks and rays, has taken much longer due to concerns about the economic impacts on fisheries, the feasibility of implementation and, in some cases, the lack of data. The first listings of shark species finally came in the mid-2000s, when basking, whale and great white sharks were added to Appendix II.



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The Manta Trust played a critical role in getting manta rays listed on CITES Appendix II in 2013, and devil rays in 2016. Meaning trade in their products is allowed if permits are provided to show it is legal and sustainable. However, as our Global Mobulid Fisheries, Policy and Trade Assessment demonstrated, unsustainable trade in mobulid products has continued to evolve and grow over the last decade; we are seeing steep, accelerating population declines across all mobulid species, in all ocean basins, due to overfishing. Time for these threatened rays is running out! If we are to halt these declines and bring manta and devil ray populations back from the brink of extinction, we desperately need stricter protections and effective enforcement.

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> **WE HELD OUR BREATH WHILST THE VOTE WAS CAST.**
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> ”

Last June, the Republic of Ecuador submitted a proposal to uplist all species of manta and devil ray to CITES Appendix I, based on vital data provided by the Manta Trust and our Affiliate Projects. So, in mid-November, I boarded a flight to Samarkand, Uzbekistan, for the twentieth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP20) along with my colleagues Dr. Guy Stevens and Nuno Barros. Our days started early and ended late, as we met with our NGO collaborators to discuss progress and strategy before heading into the conference; and then in the evenings, we attended events to rub shoulders with Party delegates, answering their questions about the mobulid proposal, sharing our expertise and giving out pin badges (whilst occasionally dressed in a manta costume for good measure).

We soon got into a daily routine at the Expo Centre, grabbing a coffee before heading to our allocated seats at the back of the main committee room, and watching as the Parties worked to tackle the extensive agenda. They discussed everything from the trade in corals to songbirds to Brazilian wood, and on Thursday afternoon, finally reached the shark and ray proposals, with oceanic white-tip sharks up first. For each proposal, the lead proponent kicks things off, giving a brief introduction to it before the floor is opened first to other Parties, then to Observers (non-voting entities, including NGOs, industry groups and scientific bodies), to make formal statements, known as “interventions,” to express their views on it. Depending on the outcome of these discussions, things then move to a final vote. Parties use a console on their desk to cast their vote, and the results are displayed on screens hanging over the room (nicknamed the screens of doom by some of our NGO collaborators). We held our breath whilst the vote was cast, and when the results appeared showing that the proposal to uplist the Critically Endangered oceanic white-tip shark to Appendix I had been successful, the room erupted in applause! Next up, tope and other smoothhound sharks were successfully listed on Appendix II to another round of rapturous applause – populations of these unassuming little sharks have been decimated by fisheries, in part for their use in fish & chips, and had this proposal failed, things would be looking very bleak for them.

We had to wait another night for the mobulid proposal, which was first on the agenda for Friday, 28th November. Guy, Nuno and I were all extremely nervous, and bopping along with some Uzbeki dance music in the cab from our hotel only helped to alleviate a tiny bit of pressure. The Secretariat started the day by reminding everyone in the room that applause and celebration of any result was strictly not allowed, before moving swiftly onto the mobulid proposal. Ecuador took the floor to introduce it and was followed by several encouraging interventions from supporting Parties, and one from Japan speaking against the proposal, which we had anticipated. Guy was ready with an intervention from the Manta Trust, but then Indonesia spoke up with a suggested amendment to remove all devil rays from the proposal.

Once again, we found ourselves waiting with our breath held, watching the screen of doom, whilst Parties voted on whether to accept Indonesia's suggested amendment to the proposal. Removing all devil rays would have completely undermined the science, leaving the most endangered species with less protection and making enforcement for all species less effective. Thankfully, the vote went strongly against Indonesia's suggestion, and at this point, the Secretariat asked Japan if it would like to concede and allow the proposal to be accepted by consensus. Japan agreed, and with that, the mobulid proposal was approved. Once again, the room erupted into applause and celebration… but it took Guy, Nuno and me a few minutes to stop shaking, process what had happened and really take the news in! It was a truly magical and emotional moment.

The rest of the day continued to deliver fantastic news, with gulper sharks, guitarfish and wedgefish gaining Appendix II listings and whale sharks getting an Appendix I listing, each getting a defiant and heartfelt applause that the Secretariat gave up trying to subdue. This level of success was an unprecedented outcome for the incredible group of NGO and policy experts dedicated to supporting these elasmobranch proposals.

Guy, Nuno, and I felt truly honoured to be in the room when the decision on the mobulid proposal was made, and to represent the Manta Trust and our Affiliate Projects, who collectively have been working for ~20 years to provide the vital science needed to author a successful proposal. Rather than being an ending, this success marks the start of a new chapter of work for us; we now need to ensure that national laws to protect mobulids in key countries are created or strengthened, fisheries and trade enforcement are improved with better monitoring and traceability, community and area-based management strategies are implemented, and consumers and markets are made aware of these legal protections.

I'd like to send a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to this outcome by purchasing a Save the Mantas t-shirt, signing the petition or donating to support our Fisheries & Conservation Policy Programme.


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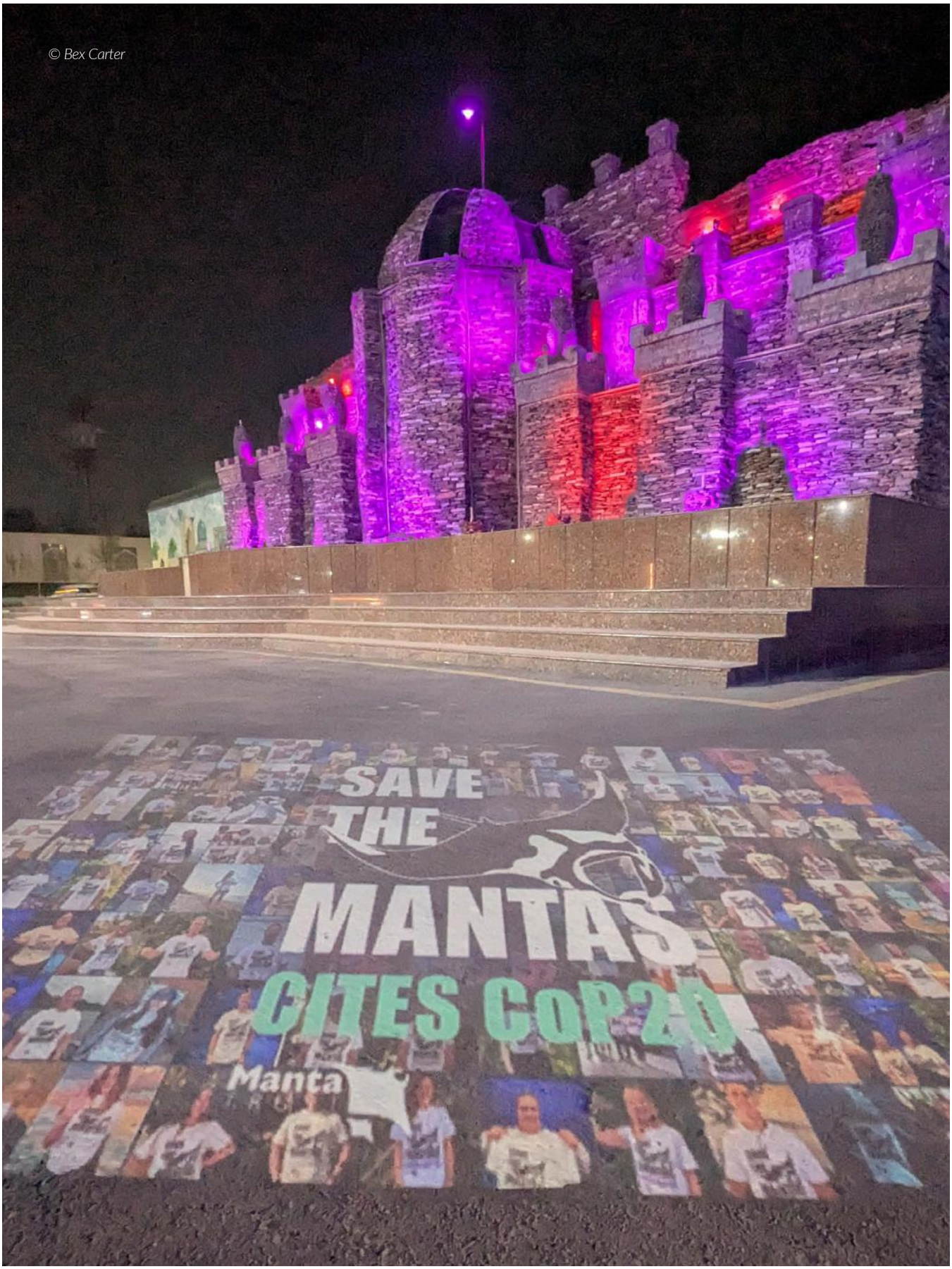
© Guy Stevens

Words by
Bex Carter
Manta Trust Director of Conservation Programmes



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© Myanmar Ocean Project

Introducing: Myanmar Ocean Project

In Myanmar's waters — sometimes challenging, often surprising — manta rays appear where you least expect them. Myanmar Ocean Project was born from moments like these — unexpected encounters that turn awe into action. As Manta Trust's newest affiliate, the project brings together marine debris cleanups, community engagement, and the conservation of manta and devil rays in one of the region's most under-studied seascapes.


MYANMAR
ocean
PROJECT


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Founded in 2019, Myanmar Ocean Project is a grassroots initiative working at the intersection of people, ocean health, and marine megafauna conservation. In this interview, we speak to founder Thanda Ko Gyi, who reflects on her first manta encounters, navigating conservation amid political upheaval, and why fishing communities must be central to protecting manta and devil rays in Myanmar.

Tell us about your first manta/devil ray encounter.

My first manta encounter in Myanmar was with a melanistic oceanic manta ray on a dive in very strong current and terrible visibility. We weren't expecting mantas, the water was green and I was kicking my fins for my life when I saw it. For a split second, I was appalled thinking it was a dirty tarp or a discarded blanket drifting in the ocean. It took a few extra seconds to register that I was seeing a melanistic manta ray and of course it was followed immediately by a stream of excited, screaming bubbles.

I've been incredibly lucky to swim with many mantas in Myanmar since but looking back, I probably should have known that dive was a sign telling me I'd be cleaning up the ocean for them!

How did you come to found Myanmar Ocean Project?

I'm not a marine biologist. I just really love and enjoy the ocean. I've been fortunate enough to spend time in places that allowed me to see the gaps in marine conservation and ocean literacy in Myanmar and have been in a position to do something about it. I've volunteered for manta research with Marine Megafauna Foundation and LAMAVE in a lot of remote locations across Southeast Asia and it deepened my desire to do more in Myanmar.

I founded Myanmar Ocean Project initially to work on marine debris, particularly abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG). Through working closely with coastal communities, my work naturally led me to my first love, manta and devil rays, not just as species of interest but as part of a much bigger social and ecological story.

I am very excited and grateful to be working with Manta Trust to further much-needed conservation efforts in Myanmar.

What legacy would you like to leave in your field of research/conservation?

That for people to be kind to the fishing communities and to always remember the context you are working in. Being able to appreciate the ocean and all its beautiful animals is a privilege, a privilege not everyone that lives along the coast gets to experience.

Fishing communities are often portrayed as a part of the problem but they too can be conservation heroes. In fact, it is more important that they are the heroes. This has been one of the most valuable lessons I've learnt from the last five years of working in Myanmar.

> “FISHING COMMUNITIES ARE OFTEN PORTRAYED AS A PART OF THE PROBLEM BUT THEY TOO CAN BE CONSERVATION HEROES. IN FACT, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAT THEY ARE THE HEROES.”

What is the most challenging part of your work?

When I founded the Myanmar Ocean Project in 2019, I was already very aware of the need to navigate the social hierarchy in Myanmar, working as a woman in an unfamiliar space where I'm not expected to lead, and without formal degrees.

Then COVID-19 happened, followed by the coup. The challenges multiplied overnight. Working safely and consistently needed extra care and planning, and securing international support became difficult, as many funders struggled to navigate the realities of the situation on the ground. We've had to adapt and pivot often to keep the work going and the team motivated, including myself.

What is the most surprising thing you have learnt about manta/devil rays?

The eye contact! I don't know anyone who has locked eyes with a manta ray underwater and not fallen in love. I'd have conversations with them in my head in those brief moments and pretend to know what their lives had been like leading up to that moment. That's been my experience at least. Unfortunately, my encounters with the devil rays have mostly been at the landing sites. I am surprised how long the smell of dead rays lingers in your room though!

If you could ask people to do one thing to help - what would it be?

To organisations: Learn to work better with people on the ground. Whether it's to support local groups with skills, capacity building or flexible funding and to support improving baseline data in under-studied regions like Myanmar, rather than writing it off as too difficult to work in.

To the general public: Remember that protecting species starts with protecting people. Conservation only works when the communities who depend on the ocean are supported, respected and included.

Words by
Thanda Ko Gyi
Myanmar Ocean Project
Project Founder


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WALKING BOOK
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Maldives Manta Magic: Conservation Highlights of 2025

From the deep waters of the open ocean, to the vibrant coral reefs and bustling island classrooms, 2025 was a year of exploration, discovery, and meaningful connection for the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme (MMCP). Across multiple atolls, our dedicated team members collected vital data, tracked manta movements, and built stronger relationships with local communities — each effort adding a crucial piece to the bigger conservation puzzle.

Last year saw fieldwork that blended cutting-edge science with hands-on education, bringing together researchers, students, and residents in a shared mission to protect the majestic mantas of the Maldives. From photo-ID surveys and satellite tagging to reef monitoring and immersive school programmes, the work of each team highlighted both the challenges and rewards of conserving these incredible creatures.

The following sections bring together the most memorable moments and achievements from each project location, told in the voices of the teams who lived them and through the eyes of the communities they worked alongside.

From December 2024, I spent three months in Makunudhoo, a small local island in the Maldives' largest lagoon in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, researching manta rays and carrying out community outreach. Our seasonal base here began after a 2021 Manta Trust expedition revealed an unexpected abundance of reef mantas, leading to the establishment of a recurring project focused on this unique resident population.

The 2024–2025 season marked our third RahVeshi Project in Makunudhoo. Children, adults, and elders alike embraced our team, making us feel truly at home and supporting every aspect of the project. During our stay, we conducted daily research trips, worked closely with the community, and delivered the Marine Education Programme for students at Makunudhoo School.

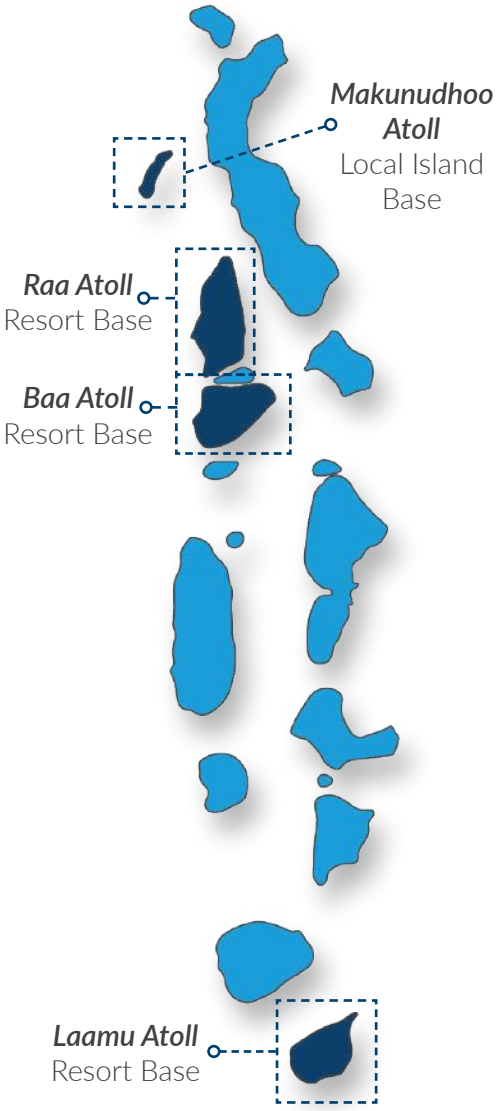
Each week, we invited locals onto our research boat to experience what the MMCP team does and to explore the lagoon and mantas around their island. Many had seen mantas from the harbour or boats, but had never swum with them. Over three months, we were able to take 39 community members out on the water — most of them children, and including eight school teachers.

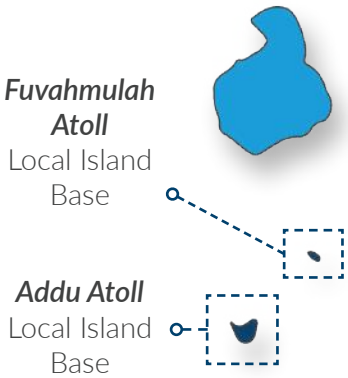
One of those children was a 10-year-old boy named Ibbe, endlessly curious about every aspect of our work. He joined the boat twice this season, asking questions about mantas, the ocean, and research, often telling us he wanted to work with the Manta Trust one day to protect the mantas around his island.

Makunudhoo reminded me that conservation is strongest when it grows from within a community. Watching children swim with their first manta, and seeing families connect more deeply with the ocean that surrounds them, showed us how these moments can shape the next generation of ocean guardians.

Makunudhoo highlights by
Dua Abdulla
Research & Outreach Officer
Baa Atoll

BASES





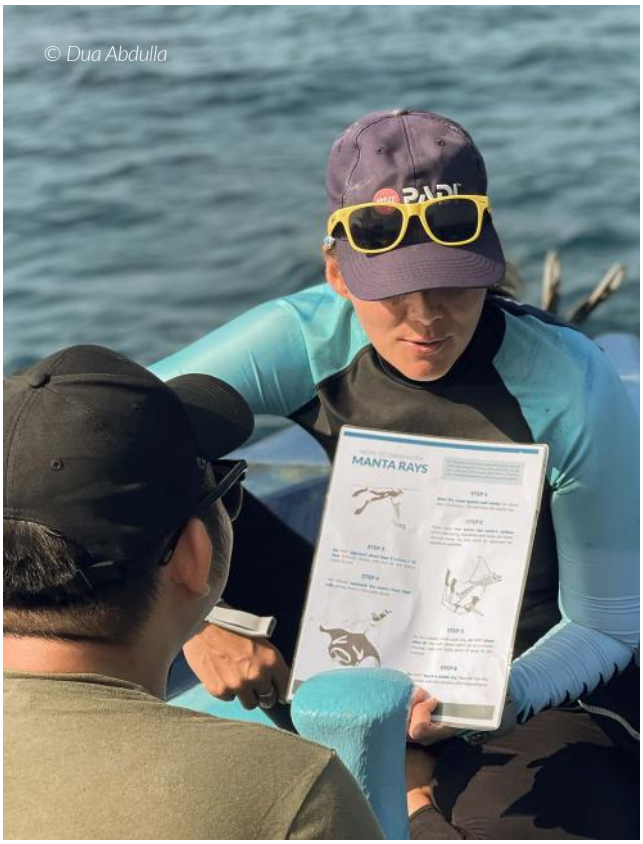
THIRD RAHVESHI PROGRAMME SEASON COMPLETED

DAILY LAGOON RESEARCH TRIPS WITH LOCAL MANTA RAY POPULATION

39 COMMUNITY MEMBERS JOINED RESEARCH TRIPS

MARINE EDUCATION PROGRAMME DELIVERED AT MAKUNUDHOO SCHOOL

MULTI-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION



The Raa Atoll MMCP base experienced an exciting year with the launch of education and outreach efforts on the neighbouring island of Meedhoo. The Raa Atoll Education Centre (RAEC) is one of the largest schools in the atoll, with over 500 students from grades 1 to 12. Building on early collaboration with school management, groundwork was laid for a long-term marine education programme called Moodhu Madharusaa.

Before officially launching, we wanted to gauge student interest and in-water confidence. Over several months, we ran two-day engagement sessions with different grades. The first day focused on classroom-based learning through presentations and quizzes, while the second introduced students to basic swimming and snorkelling skills.

These preliminary sessions, known as Moodhu Vaguthu — meaning "ocean time" — were a huge success. They helped refine the programme structure with input from school staff and identify which age groups would benefit most from long-term engagement. Looking ahead to 2026, we're excited to officially launch Moodhu Madharusaa, with the continued support of our resort partner, InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH
LAUNCHED ON MEEDHOO ISLAND

TWO-DAY MARINE EDUCATION AND IN-WATER SKILLS SESSIONS DELIVERED

PARTNERSHIP STRENGTHENED WITH RAEC (500+ STUDENTS)

FOUNDATIONS LAID FOR MOODHU MADHARUSAA 2026 LAUNCH

Raa highlights by
Meral Hafeez
Project Manager
Raa Atoll

Baa Atoll has once again delivered an unforgettable season, from reef manta cyclones to whale sharks and visiting oceanic mantas. This year also marked the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme's 20th anniversary of researching mantas from our base at Four Seasons Landaa Giraavaru — a milestone made possible by the resort's long-term support.

World-renowned for hosting large feeding aggregations of reef mantas, Baa Atoll still holds a key question: what makes it so ideal? To explore this, Dr. Phil Hosegood from the University of Plymouth has been studying the oceanographic drivers influencing manta prey since 2022. Data collection concluded this year, and early findings have already deepened our understanding.

One major insight is that when currents interact with the seabed, they create topographic eddies that concentrate and retain zooplankton. This helps explain why mantas reliably return to specific feeding sites and may eventually allow researchers and managers to better predict when and where feeding events will occur. We've greatly enjoyed collaborating with Phil and look forward to sharing more once the research is published.

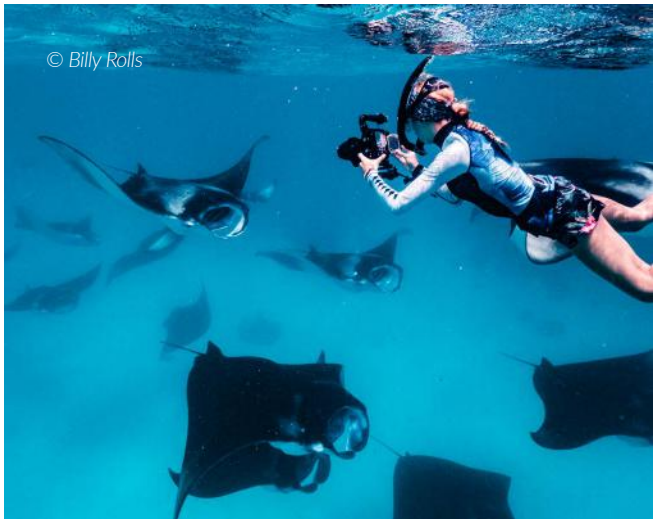
4,396 MANTA SIGHTINGS (PRE-ID VERIFICATION)

33 WHALE SHARKS OBSERVED

MULTI-YEAR OCEANOGRAPHY STUDY COMPLETED

20 YEARS OF RESEARCH AT FOUR SEASONS LANDAA GIRAAVARU

Baa highlights by
Billy Rolls
Assistant Project Manager
Baa Atoll



This past year has been an exciting one for our Eyes on the Reef (EOTR) work in Laamu — a project our team has truly enjoyed leading. Sifting through thousands of still images has become a surprisingly addictive part of our routine, offering a window into reef life when we're not there to witness it ourselves.

Across four key sites, EOTR deployments recorded 64 manta sightings, with 27 known individuals identified and one new manta — Freckles — making its only recorded appearance on camera. A deployment at Fonadhoo Outside in September captured 14 mantas in a single day, easily one of the standout moments of the year. Unexpected visitors also made appearances, including dolphins, a hammerhead shark, a whale shark, and a resident turtle.

One of our biggest highlights has been learning how to deploy EOTRs more effectively. With a single image taken every minute from a stationary camera, capturing usable ID shots is a real challenge. Understanding how mantas approach and use cleaning stations — and adjusting camera placement accordingly — has become one of our favourite parts of the work. Each improvement strengthens long-term monitoring, particularly at remote reefs we can't visit often.

A huge thank you to Six Senses Laamu for supporting and funding this work, and for helping us uncover what Laamu's mantas get up to when we're stuck on dry land.

Laamu highlights by
Summer Newton
Project Manager
Laamu Atoll

33 EOTR CAMERA DEPLOYMENTS

64 MANTA SIGHTINGS CAPTURED

27 KNOWN MANTAS IDENTIFIED

1 NEW MANTA: FRECKLES

14 MANTAS SPOTTED IN A SINGLE DAY

I've been joining the Fuvahmulah Oceanic Manta Project for several years now, and each season always feels slightly different. We arrive around March, spend several weeks on the island, and build much of our dataset through the incredible support of local dive centres. With three or even four dives a day, their commitment is the reason we know as much as we do about this population.

Even with all that effort, oceanic mantas in Fuvahmulah continue to keep us guessing. Our resighting rate remains extremely low, so we still don't know where these individuals come from — or where they disappear to once they move past the island. That uncertainty is part of what made this year so special. After years of preparation, we finally received permits to trial satellite tagging. We were approved for 11 tags and successfully deployed three, with the remaining tags planned for the upcoming season.

Before deploying any tags, we sat down with the local dive community to talk through the process and ensure everyone was on the same page. Support here has always felt natural to me — perhaps because I grew up in this ocean. I was surfing and diving long before I understood what "research" meant, and joining the Marine Education Programme when I was younger probably planted the first seed for all of this. Returning home now to collect data feels like a full-circle moment.

Each photo ID and each tagged manta adds another small piece to a puzzle that's still far from complete — and that's exactly what keeps us coming back.

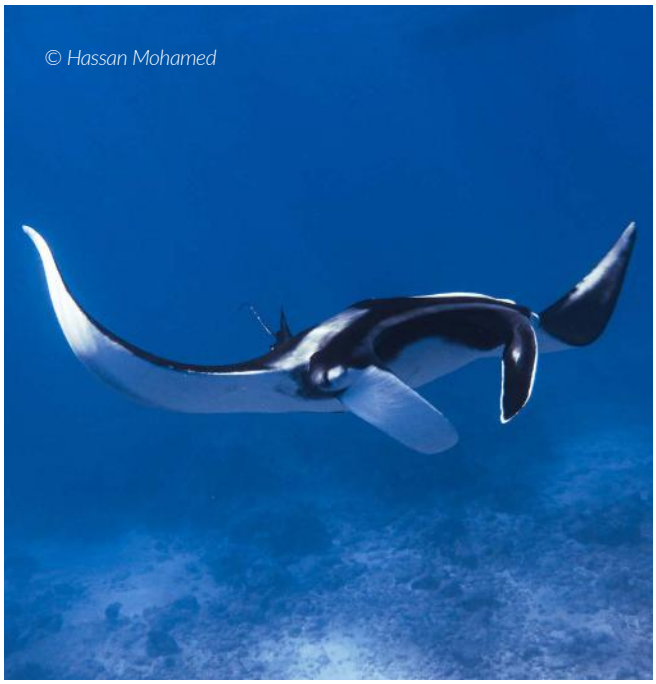
Fuvahmulah highlights by
Hassan Mohamed
Education and Outreach Coordinator
Baa Atoll

66 NEW OCEANIC MANTAS RECORDED

3 SATELLITE TAGS DEPLOYED

2 BLACK MORPH MANTAS DOCUMENTED

1,088 OCEANIC MANTAS NOW CATALOGUED IN MALDIVES



Being selected as one of five scholars for the RahVeshi Scholarship through the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme (MMCP) has been a defining step in my conservation journey. Based in Addu, this year's scholarship has brought together 5 young Addu locals that share a strong commitment to ocean conservation. Learning alongside my fellow scholars has been both motivating and grounding, as we support one another through a programme that blends training, research, and real-world field experience. Through the MMCP, I have gained practical skills in scuba diving, freediving, and marine biology, while also learning about research methods, data collection, and responsible conservation practices. These experiences have given me clarity and confidence in pursuing a long-term future in marine conservation.

Addu is uniquely important to manta ray research. The atoll has year-round manta ray sightings and supports a relatively secluded sub-population that remains understudied compared to other regions of the Maldives. This offers a rare opportunity to observe mantas across seasons, helping improve our understanding of their behaviour, residency, and movement patterns. Protecting this population is vital, not only for advancing research, but also for preserving a natural heritage closely tied to the surrounding community.

As I work towards completing my Divemaster training and continue my marine biology studies, the RahVeshi Scholarship has given me direction, purpose, and the skills to contribute meaningfully to manta ray conservation in Addu and beyond.

5 RAHVESHI SCHOLARS SELECTED

TRAINED IN SCUBA, FREEDIVING & MARINE BIOLOGY

GAINED RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION SKILLS

CONTRIBUTED TO YEAR-ROUND MANTA RAY STUDIES IN ADDU

Addu highlights by
Mariyam Nauha
RahVeshi Scholar
Addu Atoll

MUNK'S PYGMY DEVIL RAYS (*MOBULA MUNKIANA*) GATHER IN THE SEA OF CORTEZ, MEXICO

© Jay Clue

Manta Moments

In every issue, we showcase a hand-picked collection of our favourite manta encounters from around the world, brought to life through breathtaking photography by our dedicated team.

Each image tells a powerful story, capturing not only the beauty and grace of these gentle giants but also the urgency of protecting them. Through these evocative visuals, we hope to spark curiosity, inspire awe, and deepen understanding of the challenges manta and devil rays face. Let these extraordinary encounters renew your connection to the ocean and fuel a shared commitment to safeguarding manta rays for generations to come.

A RESEARCHER PHOTOGRAPHS THE IDENTIFYING SPOT PATTERNS ON THE BELLIES OF REEF MANTA RAYS (*MOBULA ALFREDI*) IN THE MALDIVES

© Simon Hilbourne

A SPINETAIL DEVIL RAY COURTSHIP SEQUENCE CAPTURED IN THE PHILIPPINES. THESE RITUALISED CHASES ALLOW FEMALES TO ASSESS THEIR SUITORS' STRENGTH AND STAMINA

© Duncan Murrell

Cyclone Member Spotlight

As much as we love sharing the behind-the-scenes of our work, we are equally inspired by YOU — the people who support it! Here, we spoke with Alene and Bruce, long-term Cyclone Members whose lives at sea and unforgettable encounters with manta rays have made them passionate supporters of the Manta Trust.

Have you ever had the chance to see manta rays in the wild? If so, can you share a memory that stands out as particularly special?

We've seen many manta rays in the wild, both oceanic and reef mantas. Our best and most memorable experiences have been at the Islas Revillagigedos in Mexico. Over a three-year period, we spent more than 18 weeks there and dived with dozens of oceanic manta rays (as well as sharks, dolphins, tuna, etc.!). In the anchorage at San Benedicto, we were privileged to witness a mating dance.

Sitting on the deck of our sailboat *Migration*, we saw a flash of white at the surface 50 metres away. We got in our dinghy and discovered a large female being courted by one male. He followed closely behind her while she circled near the surface. We watched for a while and then zoomed back to get our snorkel gear. By the time we entered the water, she had acquired another suitor. We watched at close range until dusk — nearly an hour — while she somersaulted only a few feet below the surface, followed closely by the two males. She never moved out of our sight and repeatedly made eye contact with us. The males, on the other hand, seemed quite unaware of us! It was beautiful and mesmerising… we felt very lucky.

What first inspired you to get involved with the Manta Trust? Was there a particular moment or experience that sparked your passion for manta conservation?

We had been supporting manta conservation for several years after hearing a manta researcher give a talk in California. However, our first underwater experience of an oceanic manta in Ishigaki, Japan, in 2016 changed our support into a passion. Experiencing these majestic creatures up close, while also knowing that the false claims of Chinese medicine practitioners had created a market for their gill plates, made it clear we had to do more.

Also, Bruce bought *Manta: Secret Life of Devil Rays* as a gift for Alene. Despite the heft of the book, we have carried it aboard *Migration* for years now. We've loaned it to many other sailors, hoping they will be inspired by its beautiful photography and fascinating text.

ALENE AND BRUCE - LONG TERM CYCLONE MEMBERS AND PASSIONATE SUPPORTERS OF THE MANTA TRUST

ALENE AND BRUCE'S BOAT '*MIGRATION*' ALONGSIDE AN OCEANIC MANTA RAY

© Lydia Green

ALENE AND BRUCE LOVE THE OCEAN AS MUCH AS WE DO!

Supporting manta and devil ray conservation is a powerful commitment. What motivates you personally to stand behind this cause?

The Earth is losing too many wonderful animals due to our selfish desire for more consumer goods. Spending time in the ocean and seeing mantas, whales, dolphins, and so many other wonderful sea creatures soothes our souls, but also makes us realise how much damage we are doing. Each time such a huge animal is taken, it is years before that animal can be replaced, because manta rays have such a low reproductive rate.

If you could describe the work of the Manta Trust in just one word, what would it be?

Meaningful. Conserving manta rays is meaningful work. It is sometimes more difficult to save animals that are feared — as mantas have been for centuries. So many people still confuse manta rays with stingrays and think they are dangerous. Having a better understanding of them helps us appreciate their beauty. And with the current political climate in so many countries trending away from conservation, it's even more important to support organisations we believe in.

For someone who has never seen a manta ray before, how would you describe their presence in the water?

They are simply majestic. They move with grace and what seems like dignity. They are smart and curious (especially the oceanic mantas in the Revillagigedos). For a wild creature to seek out a human is rare, but this is what happens — they sense us in the water and swim towards us out of the blue, looking very much like a mysterious UFO, then circle us repeatedly, looking into our eyes with one large black eye. Sometimes they remain nearby for as long as our air lasts, ascending to the surface with us, and even swimming around the dinghy as we remove our dive gear. Then we jump back in and continue snorkelling with them! No other wild animal behaves this way. It's this type of encounter — sensing their curiosity and what seems to be a desire to be near us — that captivates us.

As a supporter of Manta Trust's mission, what are your hopes for the future of manta and devil rays?

Our hope is that their populations will improve so much that they will be removed from the endangered list. But fishing practices must change, and they must be protected everywhere. Bottom trawling needs to be abolished worldwide so we can reduce the amount of bycatch and destruction of our oceans.

Do you have a favourite quote or saying about the ocean that inspires you?

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.
— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

If you could be any sea creature for a day, which would you choose and why? (Perhaps it would be a manta ray, or maybe something completely different!)

Alene: I think it would have to be a spinner dolphin. They look like they are having so much fun!

Bruce: Perhaps a humpback whale, so I could understand what they are singing.

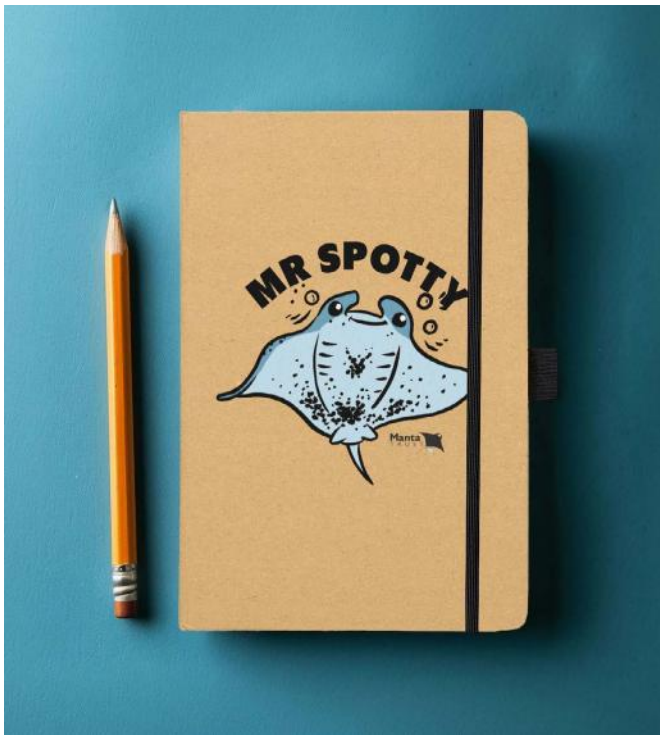
There are so many incredible species of manta and devil rays. Do you have a favourite?

Oceanic mantas take our breath away every single time we encounter them. Such a strange fish, yet so well designed for moving through the water efficiently. An underwater soaring bird, really. We are also very fond of the pygmy devil rays of the Sea of Cortez. Having them leaping like popcorn popping all around the boat is very entertaining. And swimming among a thousand of these rays is a vision we will never forget.

Finally, what message would you share with others who are thinking about supporting the conservation of manta and devil rays?

Because they are elusive, many people will never see manta rays; however, just knowing that such a magnificent and gentle being exists in the world — and has the right to live just as we do — should make us pause to think about what we purchase, what we eat, how we dispose of our rubbish, who we vote for, and which organisations we support.

Member



Benefits

Enjoy Your Exclusive Cyclone Member Perks!

As a valued member of The Cyclone, you're already making a huge difference for manta rays—and we want to thank you with some exclusive perks you're now entitled to!

You can enjoy a Buy One, Get One Free offer on our Maldives Manta Adoption Packs. Adopt a manta for yourself and receive a second Digital Adoption Pack free (worth £25)—a perfect gift for a friend or loved one! Each pack includes a personalised adoption certificate, fascinating facts about your manta, and updates on their latest sightings.

You also receive an exclusive 10% discount on everything in the Manta Trust Clothing Store, including our eco-friendly t-shirts, tote bags, and more. Every purchase helps support our vital conservation work and spreads the word about protecting manta rays.

Thank you for being such an important part of The Cyclone. Together, we're creating a brighter future for manta rays and their ocean home!

APPLY CODE **CYCLONEB1G1**
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mantatrust.org/adopt-a-manta

Thank you for your generous support! Your Cyclone Membership is helping us protect manta rays and preserve marine habitats. Every contribution fuels research, conservation, and education around the world. Together, we're making a difference for our oceans and future generations. Thank you for standing with us!

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