

Impact Report 2025





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Devil ray photo ID workshop for community members in Santa Maria, Azores.



Az-MT-0089 ♂ 18/11/2018
Maturidade/Maturity: **Maturo/Mature**
Localização/Location: **Princesa Alice**
Reavistamentos/Resights: **5**



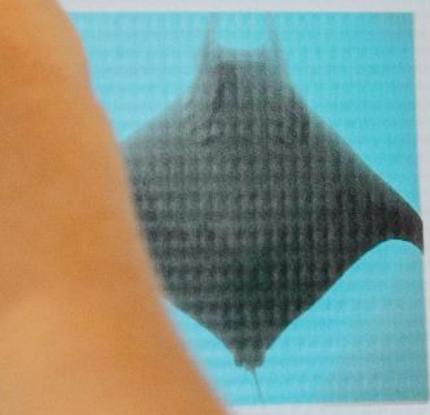
T-0053 ♂ 18/08/2010
Maturidade/Maturity: **Maturo/Mature**
Localização/Location: **Princesa Alice**
Reavistamentos/Resights: **Não/No**



Az-MT-0107 ♀ 30/07/2018
Maturidade/Maturity: **Desconhecido/Unknown**
Localização/Location: **Princesa Alice**
Reavistamentos/Resights: **Não/No**



MT-0021 ♂ 30/08/2018
Maturidade/Maturity: **Maturo/Mature**
Localização/Location: **Princesa Alice**
Reavistamentos/Resights: **No**



30/09/2021
Maturidade/Maturity: **Maturo/Mature**
Localização/Location: **Princesa Alice**
Reavistamentos/Resights: **No**

pt FOTO - IDENTIFICAÇÃO

Os padrões das manchas são únicos. Exatamente como as digitais.

As fotografias dos padrões das manchas são únicas. Exatamente como as digitais.

As fotografias dos padrões das manchas são únicas. Exatamente como as digitais.

eng PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

The spot pattern of each animal is unique, just like fingerprints.

By photographing these patterns, we can identify each individual and track their movements. We compare the images and determine where they were taken, helping us learn more about the population's ecology and migrations.

This information is crucial for the conservation of these animals.

SEGUIE-NOS PARA MAIS CURIOSIDADES

A Message from our Chief Executive

A reef manta ray in Baa Atoll, Maldives.



ve, Dr Guy Stevens



As we look back on 2025, the Manta Trust's conservation efforts reached an extremely important milestone.

At CITES CoP20, all manta and devil ray species were given the strongest international trade protections possible through member states voting by consensus to [up-list all mobulids to Appendix I](#) of the convention. This landmark decision, banning international commercial trade in these species, represents decades of research, advocacy, and collaboration across our global network and with our incredible partners. However, while the vote was a moment to celebrate, it also highlights the increasing threats to the survival of these species. Thus, 2026 marks the beginning of a new chapter: translating international protections into meaningful fisheries management efforts to halt population declines and support manta and devil ray recovery plans.

Our scientific work has continued to grow in depth and impact. In 2025, we published the Global Population Declines study and added more than a dozen research papers to our [Research Portal](#), underpinning critical conservation decisions and reinforcing the IUCN's reclassification of three oceanic devil ray species as Critically Endangered. These studies remind us of the urgency of our mission and the importance of evidence-based conservation.

In the field, our teams made tremendous impact far and wide. This summer, our [Devil Ray Research Expedition](#) in the Azores, generously supported by Carl F. Bucherer, focused on the Critically Endangered sicklefin devil ray populations at offshore seamounts. Together with local partners, including Manta Catalog Azores, we collected vital data while engaging with communities to promote sustainable practices and marine stewardship.

Education and outreach remain at the heart of the Manta Trust. In 2025, 23 [Ocean Ambassadors](#) from 11 countries developed projects to protect our oceans, while our online sessions reached thousands of students worldwide. Our World Manta Day campaign inspired action and reached over two million people, showing that conservation is a collective effort in which everyone can play a part.

Looking ahead, 2026 offers many other exciting new opportunities. The High Seas Treaty will come into force, providing a global framework to safeguard biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions - crucial for wide-ranging species like manta and devil rays. We also celebrate two decades since co-founding our flagship affiliate project, the [Maldives Manta Conservation Programme](#) - a milestone that reminds us of the progress made and the work still to come. With continued support from our partners and community, we are hopeful that this legacy of dedicated conservation will translate into lasting recovery for manta and devil ray populations worldwide.

As we reflect on 2025, we are reminded that the Manta Trust's three pillars - research, education, and collaboration - are at the heart of every achievement. From groundbreaking field studies to global education initiatives and strategic partnerships, our work shows that when people come together for conservation, meaningful change is possible. Thank you for helping us [#SavetheMantas!](#)

Dr. Guy Stevens
Chief Executive and Co-Founder



Our Approach

The Manta Trust was formed in 2011 to coordinate global manta and devil ray conservation efforts and has grown significantly in size and reputation over the last fourteen years.

Our vision is a sustainable future for the ocean, where manta rays and their relatives thrive in healthy, diverse marine ecosystems.

Our core team, comprised of 16 executive personnel and seven governance personnel in 2025, supports a global network of [affiliate projects](#), providing expert guidance and assistance with research and scientific practices, regional strategy development, media and press, fundraising, education and outreach, database management, fisheries and policy, charity governance, monitoring impact and facilitating collaboration. We started 2025 with 30 active affiliate projects, but in 2025 we welcomed two more fantastic organisations to our network: the Japan Manta Project and Myanmar Ocean Project.

The charity's team also manages the Manta Trust's central operations, including fundraising, media and communications, finance management, global database management, impact monitoring, and strategic development. In 2025, we led 21 initiatives aimed at changing legislation and policy for manta and devil rays, while also encouraging global action to protect these species and their habitats. These efforts were part of a broader portfolio of **120 initiatives** undertaken by the Manta Trust network throughout the year.

Our mission is to collaborate with affiliates around the world through research, education and by providing expert advice to drive the policies and practices necessary to conserve manta rays, their relatives and habitats.

At the end of 2023 we launched our [Five-Year Plan for Conserving Manta and Devil Rays](#). This document clearly defines our role in conserving manta and devil rays in the near- and medium-term and is used by the charity to direct global efforts. This document underpins our approach to everything, from recruitment to funding allocation, to project management.

The Five-Year Plan defines our four key conservation goals which are supported by our governance aims, also outlined in the same document:

- **GOAL ONE:** Retained bycatch and targeted catch of manta and devil rays by fisheries is reduced.
- **GOAL TWO:** Discarded bycatch and entanglement of manta and devil rays by fisheries is reduced.
- **GOAL THREE:** Manta and devil rays are better protected from growing human intrusion and disturbance, development, pollution, and the impacts of the climate crisis.
- **GOAL FOUR:** A greater number and diversity of people are taking positive action for manta and devil rays and their habitats.
- **GOVERNANCE:** The Manta Trust is a diverse collaborative organisation working with independent affiliates to deliver its mission.

In addition to securing significant funding through third-party sources, the Manta Trust awards up to £40,000 a year in grants from our unrestricted funds to affiliate projects, PhD students we supervise, and early career scientists from lower- and middle-income countries, to support work significantly contributing to the key objectives in our Five-Year Plan.

A community member swims with manta rays in virtual reality in Santa Maria, Azores.



Measuring our Impact

The clock is ticking for manta and devil rays, known collectively as mobulids. All ten species of mobulid are now listed within the Threatened Categories on the IUCN's Red List, and the three oceanic devil ray species were uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered in 2025 as a result of intensive fishing pressure. In several parts of the world, our researchers are reporting declines of over 90% in some mobulid species' populations.

A critical part of our approach is therefore to closely monitor our efforts to ensure that all the initiatives we support contribute significantly to our Five-Year Plan, and that they are effective in making positive changes. We use information and data provided by our global network during our annual reporting process to track changes within initiatives and to understand the scale and impact of the Manta Trust and our partners across our whole portfolio.

This report pulls together information from across all our active initiatives in 2025 to show how the Manta Trust and our network of affiliate projects have been delivering tangible advances for manta and devil rays and the habitats on which they depend. Each initiative may encompass multiple sites and/or species and employ several conservation, research or education methods. An initiative might be delivered by the Manta Trust directly or by an affiliate project and may be in collaboration with partners and other organisations.

Throughout this document, you will find our impact demonstrated through graphics called impact chains, which show steps leading to our ultimate **conservation outcomes**:

- **To reduce threats to manta and devil ray species.**
- **To reduce threats to manta and devil ray habitats and biodiversity.**
- **To change legislation or policy to support manta and devil ray conservation.**
- **To support sustainable livelihoods and develop local capacity for manta and devil ray conservation.**
- **To inspire more people to take positive action for manta and devil rays, and their habitats.**

We have also shared examples of some initiatives and the stories behind them. For each of these, you can see what level they have reached on the impact chain and how they contribute to the Manta Trust's [Five-Year Plan](#) using the key to the right.

The path to conservation success is rarely predictable or smooth, and the timeframes for different approaches vary greatly. However, monitoring in this way helps us to keep developing and improving our approach. If an initiative cannot progress beyond a point in the impact chain or contribute to the success of another related initiative, we take action to try and understand the reasons why. Based on our findings, we may choose to adapt our methods or take a different approach entirely to reach the desired outcome. We share lessons internally by facilitating regular regional- or topic-focused conference calls for affiliate projects, so expertise from our whole network can be capitalised on and applied.



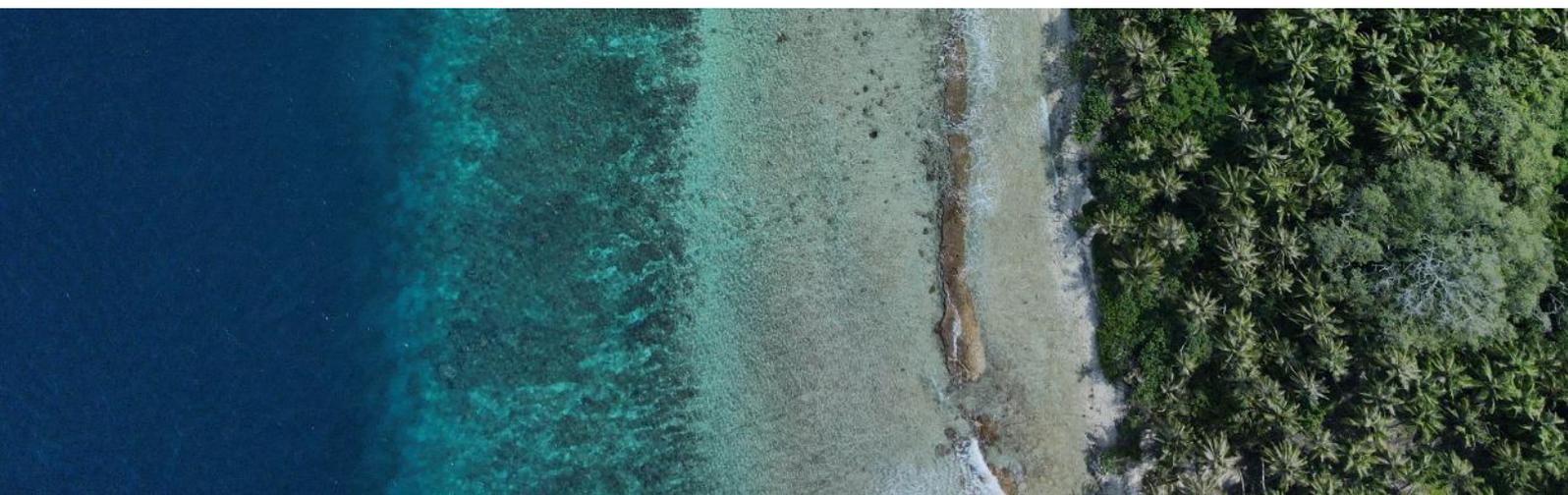
<p>GOAL ONE: Retained bycatch and targeted catch of manta and devil rays by fisheries is reduced.</p>	<p>GOAL TWO: Discarded bycatch and entanglement of manta and devil rays by fisheries is reduced.</p>	<p>GOAL THREE: Manta and devil rays are better protected from growing human intrusion and disturbance, development, pollution and the impacts of the climate crisis.</p>	<p>GOAL FOUR: A greater number and diversity of people are taking positive action for manta and devil rays and their habitats.</p>
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Under each initiative detailed in this report, we have included colour-coded symbols to demonstrate which **goal and sub-objectives** from our Five-Year Plan the initiative is contributing to. For example, the symbol to the right refers to sub-objective 1.1.3. and is therefore helping us to reduce retained bycatch and targeted catch of manta and devil rays.

1.1.3.

We have also added symbols to indicate where the initiative falls within the **impact chain**. For example, the symbols on the right represent 'P' for the Planning and Implementation stage, numbers for progress levels, and 'G' for Goal completion.

P 1 2 3 G



Dr Marta Palacios from Mobula Conservation, alongside colleague Juan, on a survey in Baja California, Mexico.



DR MARTA PALACIOS

With the science and international regulations now established on paper, the focus must shift towards action on the ground.



Interview with the Director of Mobula Conservation in Mexico, Dr Marta Palacios

Can you introduce yourself and your role within the Manta Trust network?

Marta: I am Marta D. Palacios, co-founder and Director of Mobula Conservation in Mexico, an affiliate project of The Manta Trust. I am also a member of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group's Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRA) project. I completed my MSc and PhD on devil rays in the Baja California Peninsula and, since 2016, have collaborated with the Manta Trust on projects ranging from the Galápagos and Mexico to serving on the core team supporting the 2025 CITES uplisting of mobulids.

What was a key milestone for manta and devil ray conservation in 2025, and how did your work contribute to it?

Marta: This was a pivotal year for manta and devil ray conservation, with major studies revealing severe population declines driven largely by fisheries, particularly artisanal ones, alongside a complex global trade. It was also the year Ecuador presented the CITES proposal at the Twentieth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, resulting in the uplisting of all mobulids to Appendix I and a ban on international commercial trade. I was honoured to co-author both global publications that informed and supported this decision.

From your perspective, what does it take behind the scenes to achieve stronger national protections for these species?

Marta: Change begins with the political will to update national laws and management measures for these species at a country level. This must be supported by effective enforcement, with sufficient resources and well-trained officials working at landing sites, ports

and borders. Above all, it requires a shift in perspective and the development of genuine alternatives for fishers, including diversified livelihoods that reduce reliance on catching these species and help minimise bycatch.

Policy decisions are often made at international and national levels, but what role can the public play in supporting stronger protections for manta and devil rays?

Marta: When combined, individual actions by the public can have a powerful impact. These include signing petitions, supporting conservation organisations, choosing responsible tour operators for mobulid tourism, supporting community-led initiatives, demanding transparent labelling of marine products, and reducing seafood consumption from unsustainable fisheries. Together, these actions help drive change nationally and set strong examples internationally.

Looking ahead to 2026, where do you see the biggest opportunities or challenges in manta and devil ray conservation?

Marta: With the science and international regulations now established on paper, the focus must shift towards action on the ground. This includes identifying the fisheries causing the greatest harm and working directly with fishers and governments to reduce bycatch effectively while supporting alternative livelihoods. Another key opportunity lies in implementing and enforcing spatial protection measures within Important Shark and Ray Areas identified for these species worldwide. Because these areas encompass critical mobulid habitats, such measures could significantly improve their chances of survival.

Key Highlights of 2025

12,852

recorded manta and devil ray sightings

247



operators reached with our manta and devil ray codes of conduct

13



marine research and conservation scholarships

10

manta and devil ray species uplisted to CITES Appendix I



925



attendees to our workshops to develop local capacity for research and conservation

288



fishers engaged through outreach events

109

Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) surveys conducted



26

Ocean Ambassadors, from 11 countries

43

community internships provided



1,178

students took part in our swim and snorkelling activities

3

oceanic devil ray species uplisted to Critically Endangered

107,174

young people reached through educational outreach



39

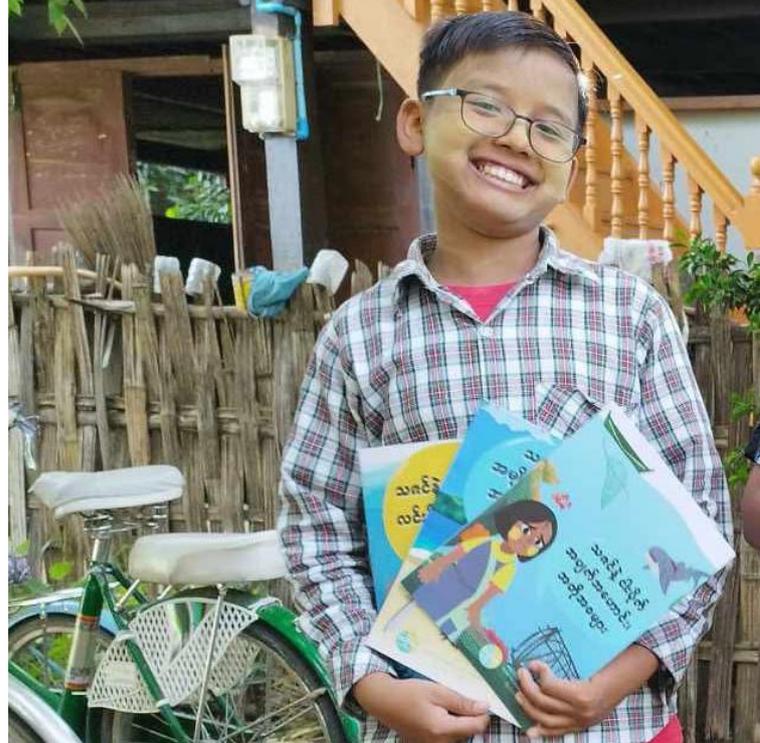
presentations given at scientific conferences and symposiums



4,253

tourists engaged through educational presentations on manta and devil ray conservation

Introducing: Myanmar Ocean Project



Introduced as a new affiliate of the Manta Trust in 2025, the Myanmar Ocean Project (MOP) works to protect Myanmar's under-studied ocean ecosystems, with a particular focus on the Myeik Archipelago. This remote region, rich in biodiversity yet under scientific scrutiny, faces mounting pressures from fisheries and marine debris. MOP integrates research, threat mitigation, and community engagement to strengthen locally led conservation initiatives.

Led by Thanda Ko Gyi, a Myanmar diver and conservationist, MOP focuses on abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), mobulid research, and ocean literacy. With Manta Trust support, Thanda collaborates with local communities to reduce fisheries impacts, conduct species monitoring, and promote sustainable practices, ensuring both marine biodiversity and livelihoods are safeguarded.

Progress in 2025

MOP surveyed nearly 90 reefs, implemented community-based ALDFG disposal systems (MOP DROPs), removed over 16,000 kg of debris, mapped shark and ray trade routes, and contributed to the designation of five Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs). Multilingual education comics reached over 300 students, with more than 8,000 copies distributed. Through these combined efforts, MOP is advancing science-based, community-driven marine conservation in Myanmar.



School students with Myanmar Ocean Project's ocean education comic book.

Objectives and Approach

The project combines science, threat reduction, and outreach to:

- **Improve scientific understanding of mobulids:** Conduct field surveys and integrate local ecological knowledge on distribution, movement, and population dynamics.
- **Identify and mitigate threats:** Assess fisheries pressures, bycatch, and trade dynamics to develop targeted interventions.
- **Strengthen ocean literacy:** Deliver educational programmes and culturally relevant resources for youth and coastal communities.
- **Build partnerships with local stakeholders:** Work with fishers, leaders, and authorities to foster sustainable practices and collaborative conservation.



Protecting species starts with protecting people. Conservation only works when the communities who depend on the ocean are supported, respected and included.
Thanda Ko Gyi, Myanmar Ocean Project Leader



Introducing: Japan Manta Project



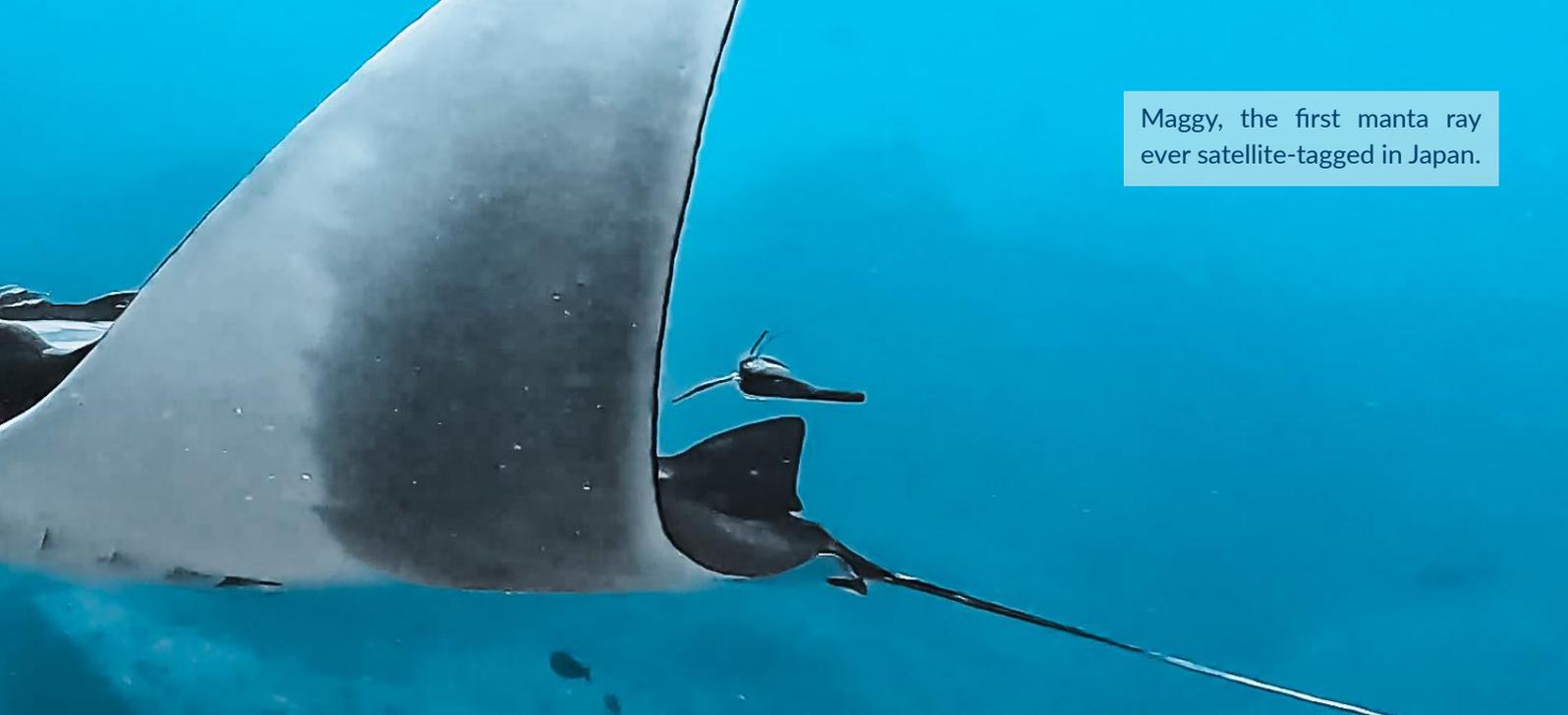
Introduced as a new affiliate of the Manta Trust in 2025, the Japan Manta Project aims to address long-standing knowledge gaps in the distribution, movement, and ecology of manta and devil rays (mobulids) across Japanese waters. Despite having the world's longest-running photo-identification database, much remains unknown about habitat use, breeding grounds, and migratory patterns, while fisheries, coastal development, and tourism continue to pose threats.

Led by Rika Ozaki, the project focuses on satellite tagging, genetic analysis, citizen science, and collaboration with local fishers to reduce bycatch and improve conservation practices. With Manta Trust support, Rika works to ensure that scientific insights inform management strategies while engaging local communities and the diving industry.

Progress in 2025

In 2025, the Japan Manta Project successfully satellite-tagged ten individuals (one oceanic manta ray and nine reef manta rays) across multiple sites in the Ryukyu Islands, expanding research beyond the Kerama Islands to include new field locations in Kumejima, Ishigaki, and Yomitan. In addition, nine tissue samples were collected to support ongoing genetic analyses, and a long-term stationary camera system was deployed at a key cleaning station in Kumejima to enhance continuous monitoring efforts. These efforts have confirmed previously undocumented movement between island groups, providing critical new insights into regional connectivity and population structure. By combining satellite telemetry, genetics, and community-based collaborations, the project is strengthening the scientific foundation for effective conservation and management of mobulid species in Japanese waters.





Maggy, the first manta ray ever satellite-tagged in Japan.

Objectives and Approach

The project integrates research, policy, and community engagement to:

- **Understand movement and habitat use:** Use sightings data and satellite telemetry to map mobulid distribution in Japanese waters.
- **Examine population connectivity:** Collect tissue samples and genetic data to understand links between Japan and the wider Pacific.
- **Engage local stakeholders:** Collaborate with fishers to reduce bycatch and improve handling practices.
- **Promote citizen science and responsible tourism:** Encourage divers to contribute sightings and follow Codes of Conduct.
- **Raise awareness:** Deliver educational workshops and outreach initiatives for schools, government and communities.




We're still piecing the story together—but one thing is clear: there's a whole world of manta behaviour happening far below the surface, and we're only just beginning to uncover it!

Rika Ozaki, Japan Manta Project Leader



A fished bentfin devil ray in Japan.

Mural painting in Santa Maria, Azores.





Azores Expedition Highlights

Santa Maria Island, 25 July – 7 August 2025

The 2025 Azores Expedition was one of the Manta Trust's most ambitious and collaborative field programmes to date. Partnering with Manta Catalog Azores and regional NGOs, our multidisciplinary team combined intensive in-water surveys with a comprehensive programme of community engagement and outreach. Over two weeks, the team collected essential data on the Critically Endangered sicklefin devil ray (*Mobula tarapacana*), strengthened regional conservation networks, and shared the magic of these ocean giants with local communities.

Operating from Santa Maria, the team surveyed Baixa do Ambrósio Marine Reserve, a globally recognised aggregation site for sicklefin devil rays. Using systematic photo-identification, drone surveys, and stereo-video photogrammetry, the expedition captured behavioural data, and high-quality imagery of these rarely observed animals. These efforts expanded the Manta Catalog Azores database and trialed new methodologies that will shape long-term monitoring and conservation strategies.

Community Engagement

Engaging people was as important as studying the animals. Over five days, the team delivered workshops, public education activities, and immersive experiences to more than 300 participants. Highlights included a collaborative mural in Anjos, celebrating local marine life, and the launch of a global art contest inviting children worldwide to create their own devil ray-inspired artwork. Local operators and residents were also introduced to a tourism Code of Conduct, helping to protect these fragile seamount ecosystems.

Connecting Science, Media and Conservation

The expedition's media team captured rare underwater footage, interviews, and expedition highlights, enriching the Manta Trust archive and supporting global outreach. This content helps raise awareness of devil ray conservation and inspires action worldwide.

Key Stats and Achievements

In-water Research

- 160+ sicklefin devil rays observed
- 55 individual rays identified
- 200 hours of in-water research

Community Engagement

- 300+ local participants engaged
- 7 workshops and 2 public education days delivered
- 1 large-scale mural painted and 1 global art contest launched

Media and Communications

- 1 short documentary produced (Where Devils Return)
- 8-part expedition video series shared globally
- Press coverage in Oceanographic and BBC Wildlife Magazine

Watch the Expedition Film

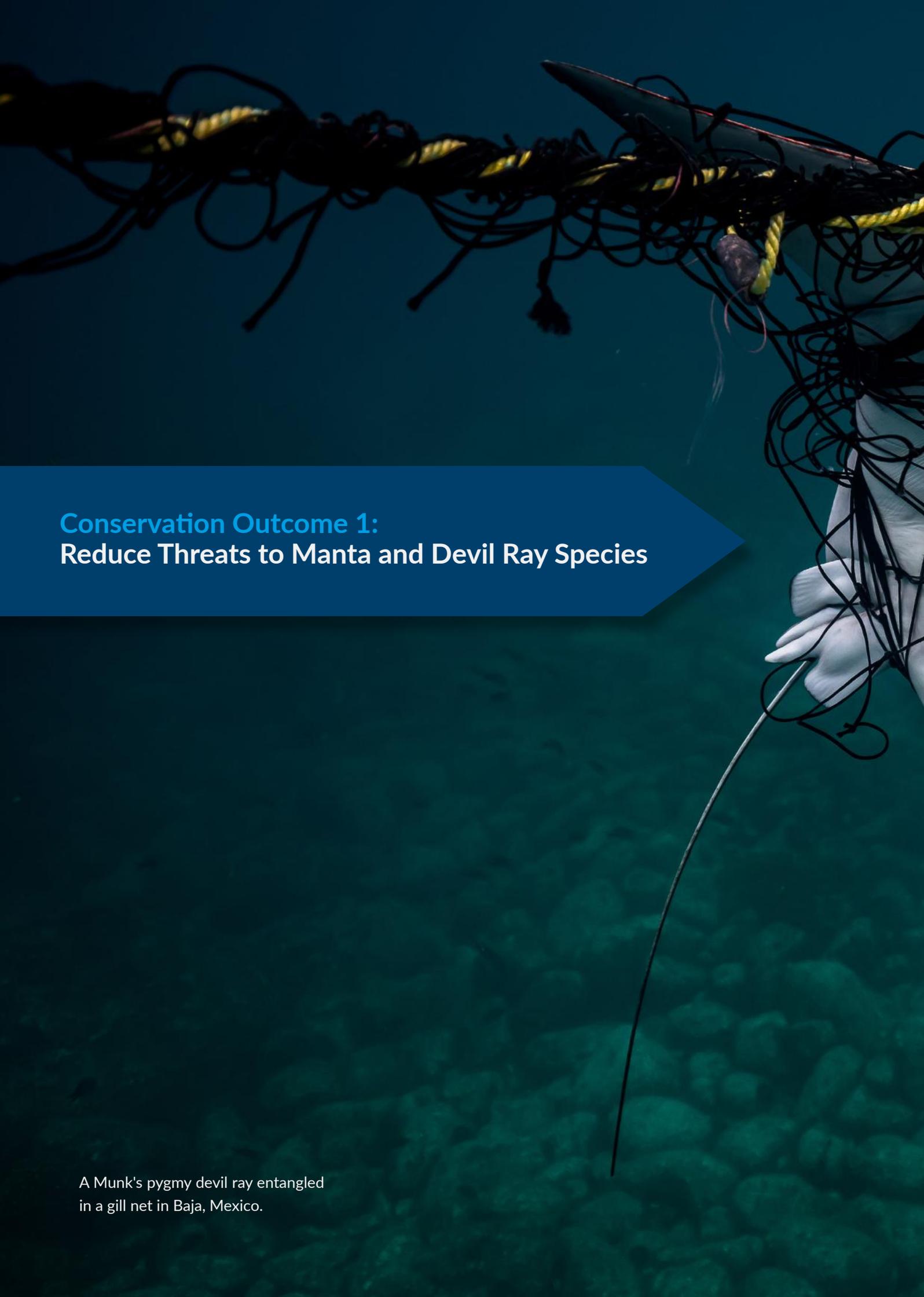
Where Devils Return | 13-minute documentary

Follow Ana Filipa Sobral and the Manta Catalog Azores team as they document, study, and protect sicklefin devil rays in the Azores. Experience immersive underwater footage, witness rare devil ray behaviour, and learn about conservation in action. Click the image below to watch Where Devils Return on YouTube.





Sicklefin devil ray aggregations
in Santa Maria, Azores.



Conservation Outcome 1:
Reduce Threats to Manta and Devil Ray Species

A Munk's pygmy devil ray entangled
in a gill net in Baja, Mexico.





NUMBER OF INITIATIVES

25

8

5

0

0

IMPACT CHAIN LEVEL

(P) Strategic planning and implementation phase

(1) Activities delivered (too soon to see results)

(2) Populations with evidence of improved enforcement/protection

(3) Populations with evidence of reduced threats

(G) Populations showing evidence of recovery

In 2025, our global network had **38** active initiatives working to reduce threats to manta and devil ray species in **15** countries and the Caribbean region.

Our network works to identify and reduce direct threats to manta and devil rays, including overfishing, vessel strikes, and entanglement in mooring lines and discarded fishing gear. Each year, an estimated quarter of a million manta and devil rays are killed by fisheries, either through targeted fishing for their meat and gill plates or as incidental bycatch in fisheries targeting other species. High bycatch rates are driven by the widespread use of unselective fishing gear in both commercial and artisanal fisheries, insufficient spatial and temporal fishing restrictions, and excessive global fishing effort.



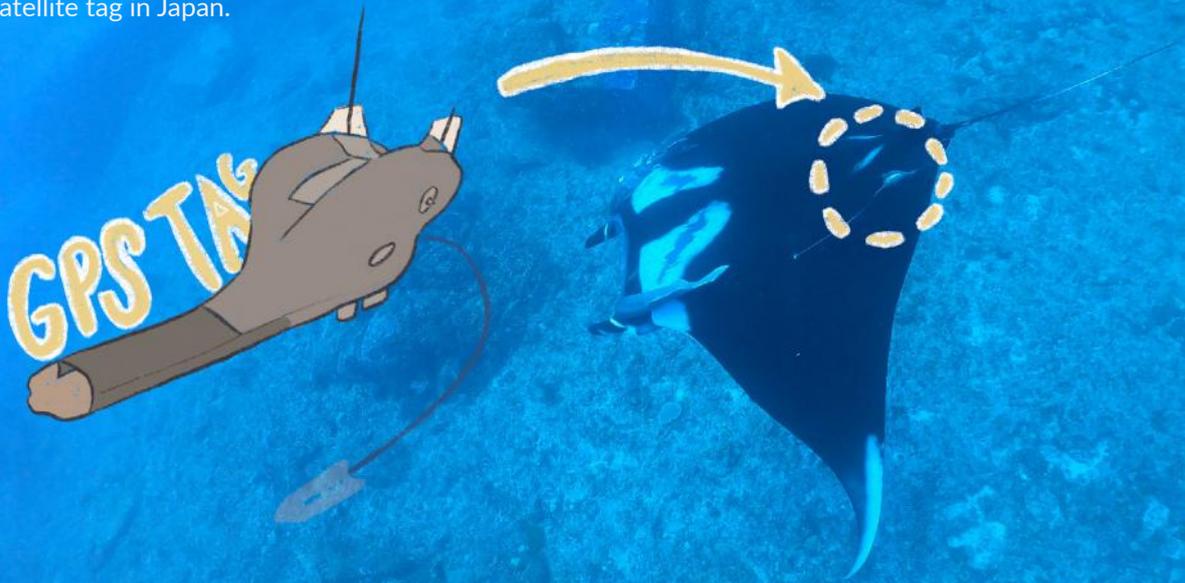
The truth is that mobulid conservation cannot be achieved in isolation. These rays cross oceans, and so must our collaborations. The joint work of the Manta Trust affiliates is not just about building databases—it is about building connections: between regions, between scientists and citizens, between knowledge and action.
Alicia Rodríguez Juncá, Manta Catalog Canary Islands Leader



Reef manta rays in French Polynesia.



An oceanic manta ray with a satellite tag in Japan.



Japan Manta Project

1

3.4.4.

Understanding the Movement of Manta Rays in the Ryukyu Islands

Oceanic manta rays are migratory and transboundary, facing threats from fisheries bycatch, pollution, and limited coordinated protection. Population declines of up to 90% have been documented for these gentle ocean giants. To support their conservation, it is critical to understand their migration routes, key habitats, and population connectivity. However, significant knowledge gaps remain across the West and South Pacific.

The Japan Manta Project aims to uncover more about the enigmatic manta rays of the Ryukyu Islands, a chain of Japanese islands stretching over 1,000 km southwest from Kyushu to Taiwan. This research is part of a collaborative satellite tagging study with Manta Watch New Zealand, Manta Project Fiji and French Polynesia Manta Project, designed to confirm critical habitats, track full migratory movements, and identify threats spanning multiple jurisdictions.

In 2025, Project Leader Rika Ozaki worked closely with local dive operators to encourage citizen scientists to submit valuable sightings data, conducted preliminary surveys to prepare for fieldwork, and deployed the first satellite tags on oceanic mantas in Japan. The study will help determine whether these endangered rays remain around specific island groups, travel to mainland Japan, or move to other regions such as the Philippines. The findings will provide essential guidance for conservation management decisions in the region.

[Learn more about animal telemetry \(tagging and tracking\).](#)

Maldives Manta P 1.1.1. 3.1.1. 3.2.1. 3.4.2. 3.4.4.

Conservation Programme (MMCP)

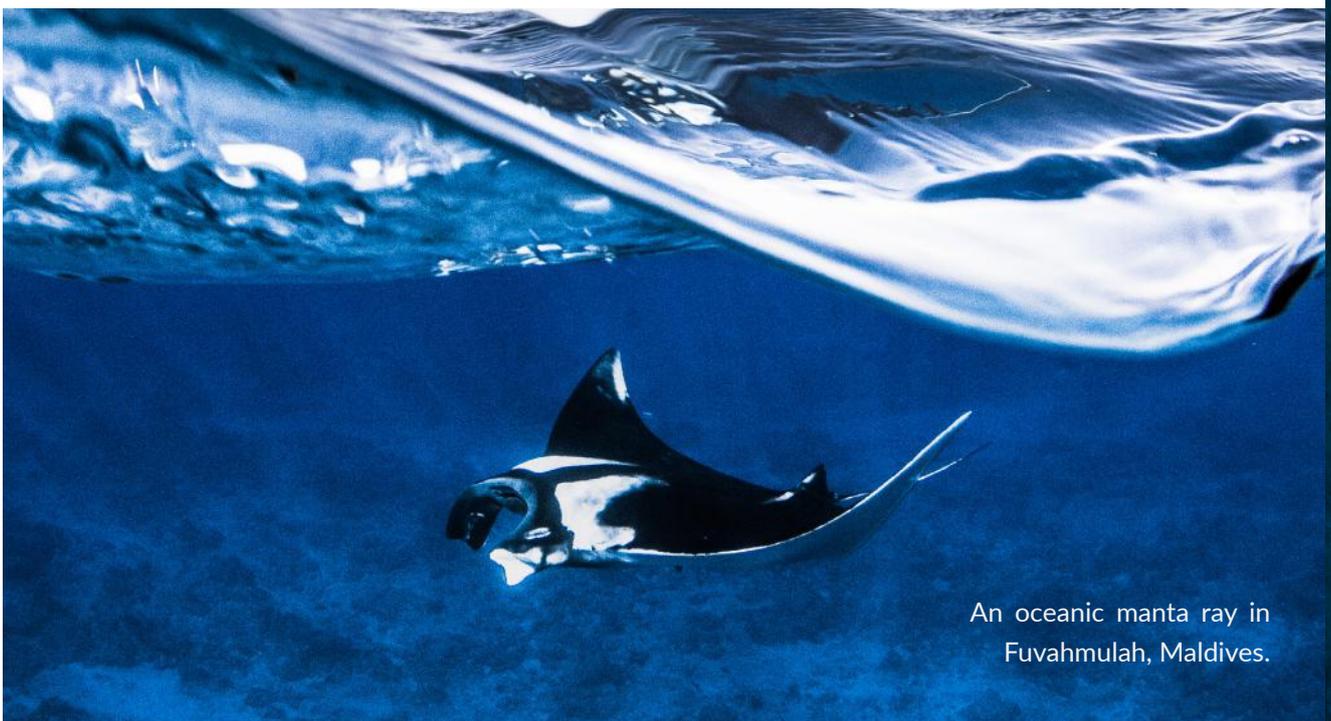
Investigating the Potential Connectivity Between Regional Populations of Oceanic Manta Rays

Fuvahmulah, one of the southernmost atolls in the Maldives, is home to an extraordinary array of marine megafauna, including whale sharks, thresher and tiger sharks, ocean sunfish, and a recently discovered, substantial population of oceanic manta rays. The drivers behind the large seasonal aggregation of manta rays each spring remain unknown. This population appears highly transient, and early indications suggest the mantas are travelling out of the Maldives into international waters once they leave Fuvahmulah, leaving them vulnerable to fisheries. Their proximity to Sri Lanka—home to one of the world’s largest manta fisheries—is an urgent conservation concern.

The MMCP’s RahVeshi Programme runs a seasonal research project in Fuvahmulah to investigate the connectivity between this population and others in the region, and, most importantly, to determine whether these endangered rays are at risk from fisheries.

In collaboration with Blue Resources Trust, an affiliate project of the Manta Trust, Project Leader Simon Hilbourne and his team are collecting tissue biopsy samples from oceanic manta rays in the Maldives to compare with samples from individuals caught in Sri Lanka’s fisheries. They are also deploying satellite tags to track migrations, assess vulnerability to fisheries, and identify locations where mantas may be targeted. The first tags were deployed in 2025, and the team is eager to share preliminary findings with the Fuvahmulah community, whose involvement has been integral to the project’s success.

[Learn more about animal telemetry \(tagging and tracking\).](#)



An oceanic manta ray in Fuvahmulah, Maldives.



An oceanic manta ray swims alongside the Manta Watch research boat in New Zealand.

Manta Watch New Zealand

Understanding the Movement of New Zealand's Manta Rays

1

1.1.1.

3.5.1.

Currently, little is known about key habitats for oceanic manta rays in New Zealand waters, including areas used for feeding, reproduction, and migration—information that is essential for advocating site-based conservation and ecosystem protections for these endangered rays. In 2019, Manta Watch New Zealand collaborated with Conservation International and the Department of Conservation (DoC) on a tagging project to better understand manta ray movements and habitat use.

Since 2021, Project Leader Lydia Green has continued this important research using a combination of tag types to capture both fine-scale, short-term movements and broader-scale, long-term tracks of up to 12 months. The long-term tracking aims to document return migrations between Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider southwest Pacific.

Fieldwork was conducted between 2020 and 2024, and in 2025, an MSc student analysed the fine-scale data, resulting in a publication in the [Royal Society of Open Science](#). Analysis of the broad-scale data is ongoing and is expected to be published in the next few years.

The next phase of Lydia's work, supported by the DoC and launched in January 2026, will focus on better understanding return migrations of oceanic manta rays. This research is part of a collaborative satellite tagging study between three of the Manta Trust's affiliate projects, the Japan Manta Project, Manta Project Fiji and the French Polynesia Manta Project,, aiming to identify critical habitats, track full migratory movements, and pinpoint multi-jurisdictional threats. Project leaders also plan to conduct knowledge-exchange interviews with fishers to understand pressures along migration corridors, particularly between Tonga, Fiji, and New Zealand. Lydia will then overlay fishing activity with manta ray movement data to identify areas of critical overlap.

[Learn more about animal telemetry \(tagging and tracking\).](#)

Manta Watch New Zealand project leader Lydia Green launches a drone for a manta ray aerial survey.



**Conservation Outcome 2:
Reduce Threats to Manta and Devil Ray
Habitats and Biodiversity**





A reef manta ray stops by a cleaning station in Raja Ampat, Indonesia.



NUMBER OF INITIATIVES PER LEVEL



IMPACT CHAIN LEVEL



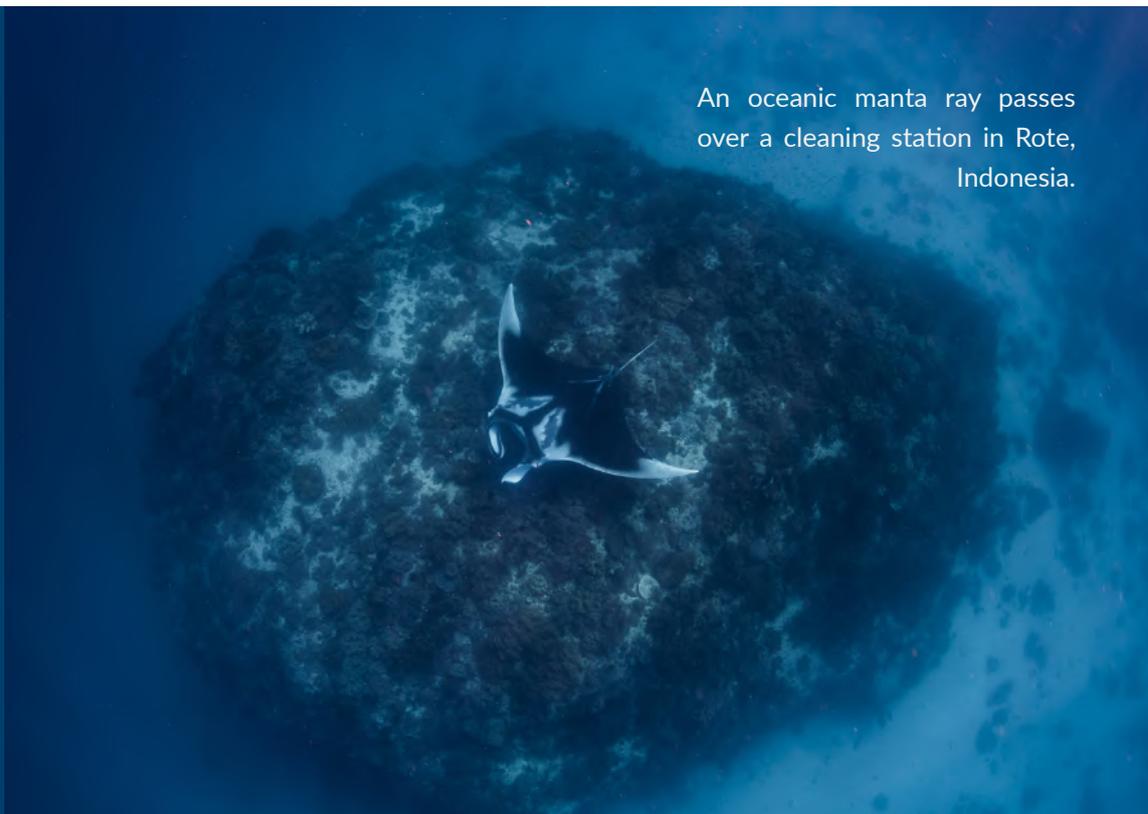
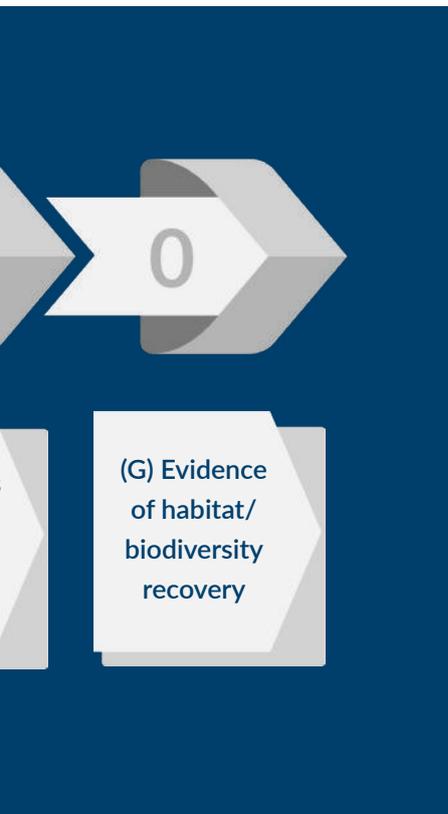
In 2025, our global network had **five** active initiatives working to reduce threats to manta and devil ray habitats and biodiversity in **four** countries.

Manta and devil rays are integral components of complex marine ecosystems. Ensuring their survival requires more than addressing the direct threats these vulnerable species face; it also depends on protecting the habitats they rely on, such as coral reefs, which are among the most threatened ecosystems in the world. In addition, we must improve our understanding of how pollution, the climate crisis, and large-scale oceanographic cycles influence the distribution and abundance of their planktonic prey, as well as key life-history parameters of manta and devil rays.



By improving traceability in the supply chain and educating communities about species vulnerability, Mobula Project Indonesia aims to reduce reliance on unsustainable practices and help protect Indonesia's marine biodiversity.

Irianies Gozali, Mobula Project Indonesia



An oceanic manta ray passes over a cleaning station in Rote, Indonesia.



Director of Mobula Conservation in Mexico, Dr Marta Palacios, conducts a plankton survey.

Mobula Conservation

1

3.4.3.

Modelling Predator and Prey

Distribution in Response to ENSO Dynamics

Spinetail devil rays (*M. mobular*) are among the most frequently caught members of the mobulid family, and population declines have been recorded across much of their range. This led the IUCN to uplist the species to Critically Endangered in 2025. Their distribution and movement patterns are closely linked to dynamic oceanographic processes, so Mobula Conservation is working to better understand the potential impacts of climate variability on this species and its primary prey, *Nyctiphanes simplex* (a type of krill), in northwestern Mexico.

The study, led by Co-Project Leader Dr. Nerea Lezama-Ochoa, found that environmental conditions during La Niña resulted in particularly high habitat suitability and overlap for both species within the Gulf of California during August and September. In contrast, during El Niño, habitat suitability and overlap were higher along the west coast of the Gulf. Nerea's findings, published in [Marine Ecology Progress Series](#) in June 2025, demonstrate how predicting distribution patterns of data-poor species can provide vital information for marine resource managers to develop effective conservation strategies for species of concern, such as spinetail devil rays.

Publication Spotlight

Global Study Maps Marine Megafauna Movements to Guide Ocean Conservation

In 2025, the Manta Trust Network contributed to a [landmark international study](#) led by Australian National University which produced the most comprehensive global map yet of marine megafauna movements, revealing that current global ocean protection targets will not be enough to safeguard many vulnerable species, including manta rays. The research forms part of the MegaMove initiative and has been endorsed by the United Nations.

The study brought together nearly 400 scientists from more than 50 countries to analyse over 12,000 tracking records from more than 110 species of marine megafauna - including sharks, whales, turtles, seals and rays. These data span three decades and cover around 71.7% of the world's ocean surface, offering an unprecedented view of how large marine animals move through the global ocean.

Researchers found that approximately 66% of the tracked ocean space is used by these species for critical behaviours such as migration, mating, feeding and resting. However, more than 75% of these important habitats overlap with major human pressures, including industrial fishing, shipping routes, ocean warming and plastic pollution.

The findings highlight limitations in the global goal to protect 30% of the ocean under the High Seas Treaty. While the target represents a crucial step forward, the analysis suggests it would still leave critical megafauna habitats exposed to threats than protected.

The research underscores the need for a broader conservation strategy that combines expanded marine protected areas with additional measures. These could include improved fishing gear to reduce accidental catch and habitat damage, smarter routing of shipping lanes to avoid key wildlife areas, and stronger efforts to reduce marine pollution.

The results provide a science-based blueprint for future ocean protection. By identifying the areas most essential to marine megafauna, the study can help guide conservation policies aimed at achieving global biodiversity commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

With around one-third of marine megafauna species already at risk of extinction, researchers warn that coordinated global action will be essential to secure the future of these iconic ocean animals and the ecosystems they support.



**Conservation Outcome 3:
Change Legislation or Policy to Support
Manta and Devil Ray Conservation**



#SaveTheMantas campaign
projections at CITES CoP20.





NUMBER OF INITIATIVES PER LEVEL



IMPACT CHAIN LEVEL



In 2025, our global network had **35** active initiatives working to change legislation or policy to support manta and devil ray conservation in **eight** countries and internationally.

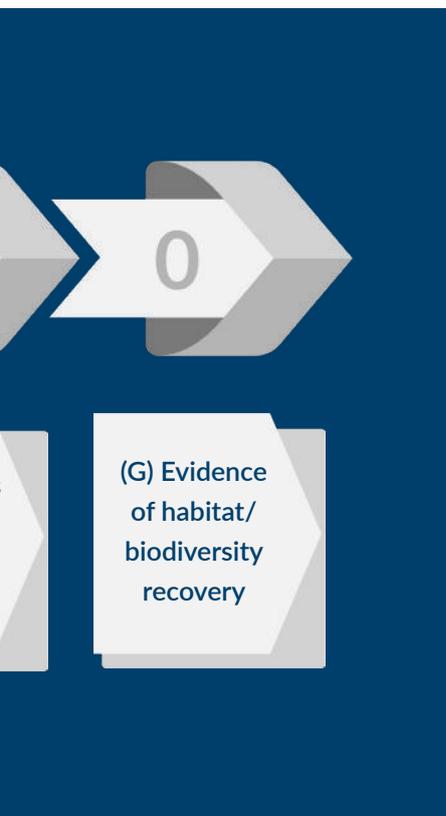


Strong policy and legislation form the foundation for meaningful, long-lasting conservation. Despite their threatened status, manta and devil rays still lack adequate legal protection in many key regions. Our network is working to identify and address policy gaps and loopholes, build political and institutional support for their protection, and strengthen capacity for the effective enforcement of conservation measures.

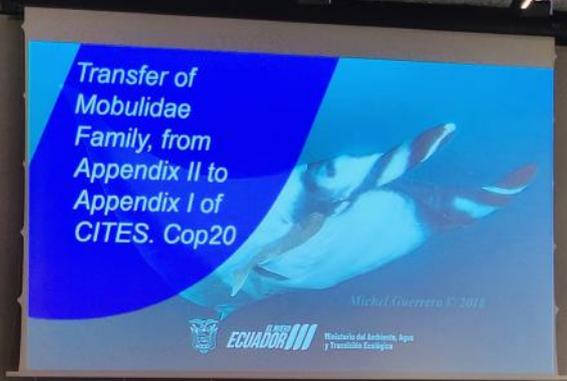


Through my research, I seek to avoid placing disproportionate conservation burdens on socio-economically vulnerable coastal fishing communities, directly informing the India Mobulid Project's focus on understanding fishers' motivations and fishing drivers to support the development of more equitable conservation policies.

Mayuri Chopra, India Mobulid Project Leader



Presentation on the proposal to uplist mobulids to CITES Appendix I at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland.





African Marine Conservation



Organisation and the Manta Trust

Establishing a West and Central Africa Shark and Ray Coalition for a Regionally Coordinated Conservation Approach

West and Central Africa rank among the top regions globally for shark and ray catches, despite being a biodiversity hotspot with critical nursery areas for many threatened species. These species have significant ecological and economic value, yet conservation efforts in the region remain limited and fragmented. Isolated research activities have hindered knowledge sharing, capacity development, and collaboration, resulting in major data gaps on species distribution, habitat use, population trends, and fisheries impacts. A coordinated, regional approach is essential to develop evidence-based strategies to reduce shark and ray mortality.

The Manta Trust and the African Marine Conservation Organisation are collaborating to establish a regional coalition of key organisations across West and Central Africa to implement a regional plan of action aimed at reducing shark and ray fisheries mortality, including both targeted catches and retained bycatch by strengthening research for policy, enhancing collaboration and improving policy initiatives.

In 2025, the coalition formalised its structure with a coordination group to oversee implementation and a steering committee to guide strategy. Lead Coordinator Ghofrane Labyedh also worked with the Manta Trust Fisheries and Policy and Fundraising Teams to secure significant funding to sustain this work and conducted surveys with coalition members from 14 coastal nations (Cameroon, Senegal, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Benin, Ghana, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Togo). These surveys reviewed shark and ray policies, fisheries, and trade, assessed the feasibility of proposed policies, prioritised actions, aligned the regional plan of action with on-the-ground realities, and identified priority countries for implementation.

Building on these outcomes, the coalition's next phase will focus on strengthening CITES enforcement in five key countries in the region: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, and Senegal. This work will be supported by the development of a comprehensive regional identification guide and atlas of shark and ray species to serve as a reference tool and centralised data resource. In parallel, the coalition will produce a regional review paper synthesising current knowledge on shark and ray fisheries, policy frameworks, and trade dynamics to support evidence-based decision-making and conservation planning.

Blue Resources Trust and the Manta Trust



Reassessment of the Conservation Status of the Oceanic Devil Rays

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species is the leading global indicator of species' conservation status, guiding protection efforts and policy based on criteria such as population trends, fishing pressure, and future projections. In 2025, the Manta Trust Fisheries and Policy Team and Blue Resources Project Leader Daniel Fernando served as IUCN Assessors for the three oceanic devil ray species—spinetail, sicklefin, and bentfin—collaborating with other mobulid experts to compile current data, much of it drawn from years of robust research by the Manta Trust affiliate network.

The findings met IUCN criteria for population reductions of 50–79% or more over the last three generations, with similar declines projected, leading to all three species being uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered in October 2025. Key factors driving the uplisting included:

- Steep population declines across the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans.
- Evidence from landing data, reduced sightings, and expert observations.
- Continued overfishing and bycatch, with most catches unreported.
- High, often illegal, international trade in meat and gill plates.
- Slow reproductive rates, making population recovery extremely difficult.

The uplisting demonstrates that existing national, regional, and international protections are insufficient. Having been listed as Endangered in 2018, these species' rapid decline underscores the urgent need for stronger, science-based, and enforceable conservation measures. The assessment also contributed to the decision to uplist all mobulids to Appendix I of CITES in November 2025. Blue Resources Trust and the Manta Trust Fisheries and Policy Team will continue this work with the IUCN in 2026, to reassess more mobulid species.



Sicklefin devil ray in
Santa Maria, Azores.



The Manta Trust Fisheries and Policy Conservation Programme

Historic Global Protection for Manta and Devil Rays: All Species Uplisted to CITES Appendix I

In a landmark decision for ocean conservation, all species of manta and devil rays (collectively known as mobulids) have been uplisted to Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in November 2025. This grants these species the strongest international protection from commercial trade, a critical step to prevent their extinction.

Established in 1975, CITES is a global agreement aimed at ensuring international trade in wild species does not threaten their survival. With 185 member countries, CITES has strengthened protections for iconic species like tigers, Asian elephants, and humpback whales. However, commercial species of fish—including sharks and rays—have historically faced delays in protection due to concerns about the economic impacts on fisheries, the feasibility of implementation and, in some cases, the lack of data.

Mobulids have faced growing threats from overfishing and the international trade in their products. Previous protections under Appendix II—granted to manta rays in 2013 and devil rays in 2016—allowed trade only if permits proved it was legal and sustainable. Yet, population declines have accelerated worldwide over the past decade, highlighting the urgent need for stronger safeguards.

The uplisting proposal, submitted by the Republic of Ecuador in June 2025, was backed by vital scientific data provided by the Manta Trust and its global network of affiliate projects. Dr Guy Stevens, Bex Carter and Nuno Barros of the Manta Trust's Fisheries and Policy Team attended the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20) in Uzbekistan, ensuring delegates had the latest scientific evidence to support the proposal.

After discussion and debate, the mobilid uplisting was approved by consensus, overcoming opposition and marking a historic global first for these species.

This decision is the culmination of nearly two decades of dedicated science and advocacy. It is a landmark victory for ocean conservation, but it is just the beginning. We now need to translate this international agreement into effective national laws, better fisheries enforcement, and community-based management to secure the future of these magnificent animals.

Next Steps:

- Strengthening national protections in key countries.
- Improving fisheries and trade monitoring and enforcement.
- Implementing community and area-based management strategies.
- Raising awareness among consumers and markets about legal protections.

We would like to say a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to this outcome by purchasing a #SaveTheMantas t-shirt, signing the petition or donating to support our Fisheries and Conservation Policy Programme.





**Conservation Outcome 4:
Support Sustainable Livelihoods and Develop Local
Capacity for Manta and Devil Ray Conservation**

SOUL

Community marine education session in Makunudhoo, Maldives.





NUMBER OF
INITIATIVES
PER LEVEL

4

2

5

3

0

IMPACT
CHAIN
LEVEL

(P) Strategic
planning and
implementation
phase

(1) Activities
delivered
(too soon to
see results)

(2) Positive
engagement
in biodiversity
conservation

(3) More
people local
to mobilids
involved in their
conservation

(4) Changes in
attitudes

In 2025, our global network had **14** active initiatives working to support sustainable livelihoods and develop local capacity for manta and devil ray in **four** countries.

To identify sustainable solutions to marine conservation challenges, our efforts must be locally driven. In key manta and devil ray regions, this involves harnessing local knowledge and enthusiasm by supporting current and emerging conservationists through resources, training, funding, and employment opportunities. In some areas, it also requires working with manta and devil ray fishers and their communities to transition toward economically viable and more sustainable livelihoods.



In setting up Manta Watch New Zealand, I wanted the project to be primarily citizen science focussed and our collective discoveries be engaging, interactive and accessible to all. I'm eager for our progress to be shared and celebrated within our wider communities and for everyone to learn and be excited.

Lydia Green, Manta Watch New Zealand Leader



Surf lessons as part of the Ocean Women programme in the Maldives.

The Mobula Project Indonesia team.



Mobula Project Indonesia

2

Studentship and Educational Outreach

4.3.1.

4.3.2.

Sharks and mobulids (manta and devil rays) face critical extinction risk in Indonesia, where they are highly vulnerable to fishing pressure and frequently caught as bycatch in Muncar, East Java. With over 600 gillnet boats operating in the region, the cumulative impact on these species is significant. Project Leader Muhammad (Egin) Salim and his team are partnering with Brawijaya University to implement the government programme “MBKM,” which aims to raise awareness of shark and mobulid conservation and inspire young Indonesians to pursue careers in research and conservation.

Students of the MBKM programme dedicate one semester to hands-on marine science activities, particularly data collection and monitoring of landings. They also receive instruction in fisheries and research methodologies and opportunities to present their work at national-level symposiums.

To date, MBKM has provided meaningful internships for 40 university students, partnered with Oxford University and IPB University to conduct incentive-based joint research projects, and educated 100 students through targeted outreach programmes. Fifteen students are conducting research on sharks and rays and have already completed 15 undergraduate thesis’ on topics related to sharks and rays. Five MBKM students presented at the Shark and Ray Symposium Indonesia, showcasing impactful research that raised awareness and fostered dialogue on shark and ray conservation.

Looking ahead, the team aims to expand partnerships with universities in Banyuwangi, Tuban, and Sumatra to engage more students and nurture the next generation of conservationists.

Papua New Guinea Manta Project (PNGMP)

Establishing a Papua New Guinea Manta Research Team



Papua New Guinea sits at the heart of the world-renowned Coral Triangle in the Indo-West Pacific Ocean and is home to extraordinary marine biodiversity. Over two-thirds of its reef fishes are found in Milne Bay Province, one of the few places where Endangered oceanic manta rays and Vulnerable reef manta rays can be studied alongside Critically Endangered spintail devil rays. With no reported fisheries and minimal human presence, Milne Bay offers a rare opportunity to study these rays in a largely undisturbed environment, providing a baseline for global manta conservation efforts.

Project Leader Dr. Annie Murray is collaborating with the Conflict Islands Conservation Initiative (CICI) to develop local conservation capacity by providing specialist training in manta ecology, mobulid research methods, and data management. This work is building a confident and knowledgeable team of mobulid researchers in the Conflict Islands.

In 2023 and 2024, Dr. Murray conducted two successful training and research trips with CICI rangers, delivering in-water manta training to 10 rangers and theory training to a wider team of 20. A core manta team was established, including a team leader and data manager trained in data analysis and management. This Papua New Guinean team will be responsible for collecting data, building a regional manta ray database, and monitoring populations, movement patterns, site fidelity, and behaviours.



Ranger manta ray education session in Papua New Guinea.

Conservation Outcome 5:
Inspire More People to Take Positive Action for
Manta and Devil Rays and Their Habitats



SA

TH

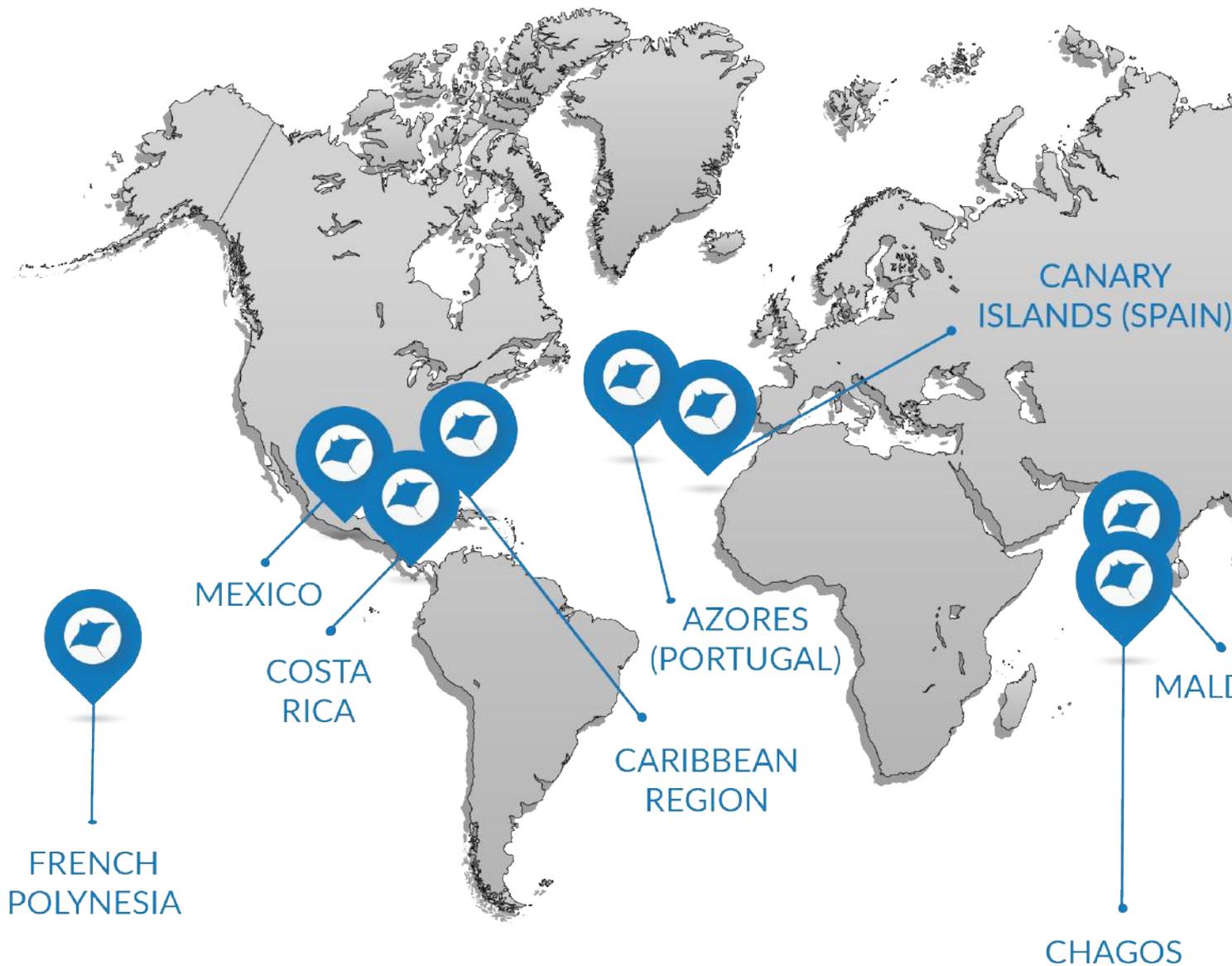
M

CIT

Manta
TRUST

Devil ray photo ID workshop
for community members in
Santa Maria, Azores.





NUMBER OF INITIATIVES PER LEVEL

11

5

11

1

0

IMPACT CHAIN LEVEL

(P) Strategic planning and implementation phase

(1) Activities delivered (too soon to see results)

(2) Sites brought under conservation management

(3) Sites with evidence of improved enforcement/

4) Populations with evidence of reduced threats

In 2025, our global network had **28** active initiatives working to inspire more people to take positive action for manta and devil rays and their habitats in over **12** countries and the Caribbean region.



People can have a positive impact on manta and devil rays, whether they interact with them directly, live near their habitats, or are far removed from them. This might include a scuba diver following our mobulid code of conduct, a fisher using bycatch mitigation gear, an educator teaching about the impacts of the climate crisis on oceans, a consumer reducing their seafood consumption or choosing an alternative to gill plates for medicinal purposes. Around the world, our network connects people to a wide range of opportunities to make a meaningful difference for these endangered species and the ecosystems they rely on.



Through education, capacity building and further research it is hoped that Fiji can lead the way on the conservation of the species, not only in the South Pacific, but globally.

Luke Gordon, Manta Project Fiji Leader

0

(G) Evidence of habitat/biodiversity recovery



Street Whale marine education festival in Cameroon.

Manta ray code of conduct diver briefing in the Maldives.



ConnectOcean and Manta Trust

Manta Trust E-learning Course and PADI Distinctive Speciality



ConnectOcean and the Manta Trust’s Education Manager are equipping communities to safeguard manta and devil rays through a new E-learning Course and PADI Distinctive Speciality. These resources will guide local groups in creating Community Protected Areas (CPAs) using science, sustainable tourism, and hands-on conservation strategies.

The initiative aims to leverage PADI’s global network of 6600 dive centres and 128,000 professional members to reach communities where it matters most – helping them to collect data, advocate for policy change, and build lasting conservation skills.

A major milestone in 2025 was the completion of all five chapters of the ConnectOcean / Manta Trust Explorer E-Learning, delivered via the Area9 Lyceum adaptive learning platform, positioning it for launch in early 2026. In parallel, the first full draft of the PADI Manta Trust Explorer Distinctive Speciality, covering manta and devil ray conservation, was completed and scheduled for review in spring 2026.

Together, these initiatives bridge digital education with in-water learning and community engagement, supporting sustainable development and the protection of these iconic species for generations.

Manta Project Fiji

2

4.2.1.

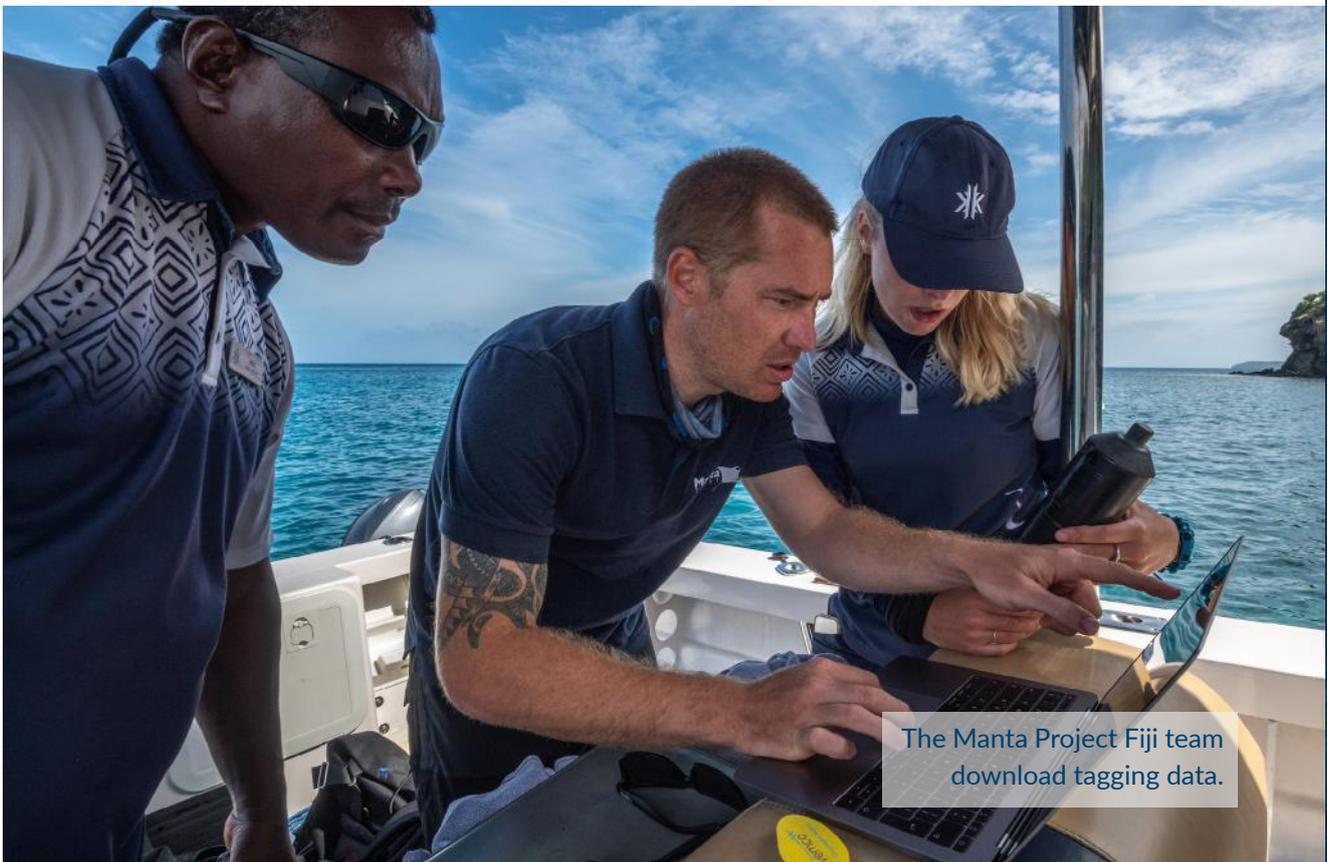
4.2.2.

Implementation of Management Protocols and Strategies Surrounding the Yasawa Channel

One of Manta Project Fiji's research sites in the Yasawa Islands is a small channel where reef manta rays forage from April to October. Thirteen operators bring tourists here, but little management exists to protect feeding mantas from disturbance. Sightings data show a decline in manta residency, which is particularly concerning as a few individuals account for over 70% of sightings. During COVID-19 (2020–2022), fewer snorkelers coincided with higher manta sightings, but numbers have risen again, highlighting the likely negative impact of unregulated tourism.

Project Leader Luke Gordon has been working in collaboration with the Drawaqa Marine Conservation Trust towards improved management of this site by sharing data with communities and stakeholders, implementing a mobulid tourism code of conduct, conducting in-water training for resort staff, and contributing data that led to the site's designation as an Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA) in 2024.

In 2025, a stakeholder consultation facilitated by Manta Project Fiji, the Drawaqa Marine Conservation Trust and the Ministry of Fisheries resulted in the creation of the Drawaqa Island MPA, which includes the manta foraging site and was ratified in August 2025. This allows tourism management protocols to be implemented, with further management meetings and resort training scheduled for early 2026. Luke is now seeking funding to enhance monitoring during manta season and ensure all operators follow the management framework.



Peer-Reviewed Publications

The Manta Trust core team and our network of affiliate projects have continued to work tirelessly to transform years of data collection into peer-reviewed publications that drive scientific understanding and strengthen conservation action.



6

Student Theses

We are supervising 14 PhD and 4 Masters students and supported one PhD and five Masters students who completed their theses in 2025.

18

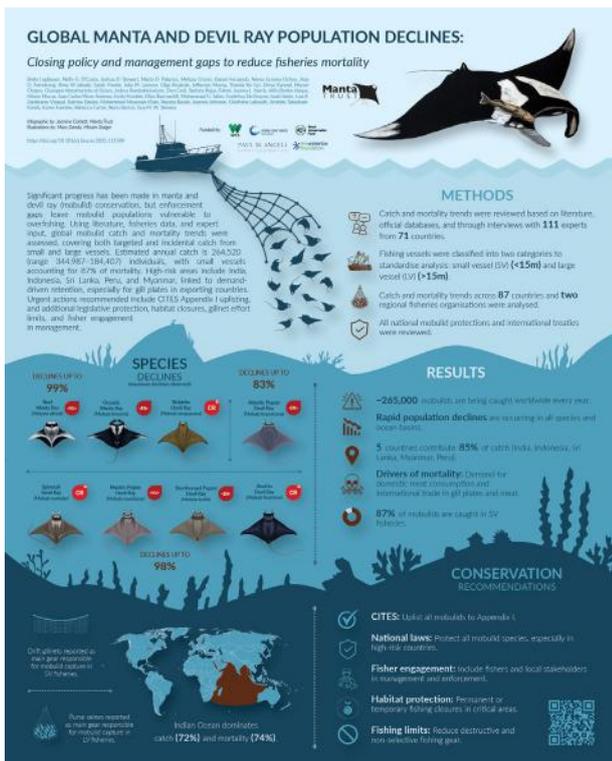
Published Papers

Manta Trust core personnel and affiliate project researchers were lead or co-authors on 18 peer-reviewed publications this year.

>33,000

Accesses

Each paper was accessed over 1500 times on average. The number of citations will be a true indication of impact but this will not be known for a while.



Highlighted Publication

Global Manta and Devil Ray Population Declines

The Manta Trust, collaborating with international researchers, published a major study estimating that around 265,000 manta and devil rays are killed annually, largely in small-scale fisheries in countries including India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Peru and Myanmar. Driven by demand for gill plates and meat, the study calls for stronger protections, improved fisheries management and urgent action to halt further population declines.



Laglbauer et al. 2025. Global manta and devil ray population declines: Closing policy and management gaps to reduce fisheries mortality

List of peer-reviewed publications from 2025

The Manta Trust is committed to breaking down barriers in science communication. One such barrier is the cost of accessing publications. The Manta Trust is committed to making all papers open access where the lead author's primary affiliation is to our charity, at a cost of \$3,000–\$5,000 USD per paper. Our [Research Portal](#) further supports this by providing a central directory of Manta Trust research publications and resources.

	Publication title	Journal	Authors
1.	Genetic and morphometric support for the Atlantic pygmy devil ray, <i>Mobula hypostoma</i> , in the eastern Atlantic Ocean	Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems	Emily Humble et al.
2.	Global tracking of marine megafauna space use reveals how to achieve conservation targets	Science	Ana Sequeira et al.
3.	Modeling predator (<i>Mobula mobular</i>) and prey (<i>Nyctiphanes simplex</i>) distribution in response to ENSO dynamics	Marine Ecology Progress Series	Nerea Lezama-Ochoa et al.
4.	Large marine protected areas can encompass movements of diverse megafauna	Journal of Applied Ecology	Alice M. Trevail et al.
5.	Biodiversity and conservation of elasmobranchs in the Mascarene Islands: Policy implementation and protection strategies	Ocean and Coastal Management	Estelle Crochelet et al.
6.	High take of mobulid rays in East Java, Indonesia: landing trends and socio-economic context	Environmental Biology of Fishes	Betty J. L. Laglbauer et al.
7.	Inferring leader-follower behavior from presence data in the marine environment: A case study on reef manta rays	PLOS	Juan Fernández-Gracia et al.
8.	Deep diving behaviour in oceanic manta rays and its potential function	Frontiers in Marine Science	Calvin S. Beale et al.
9.	Guinean landing surveys of bentfin devil rays add insight into threatened elasmobranch catch	Environmental Biology of Fishes	Shay Kashey et al.
10.	spatial ecology of the population of reef manta rays (<i>mobula alfredi</i>) in new caledonia using satellite telemetry 2—vertical behaviour	Fishes	Hugo Lassaue et al.
11.	Evidence for a fisher-designed solution to manta and devil ray bycatch in tuna fisheries	Conservation Biology	Melissa R. Cronin et al.
12.	Composition and conservation status of rays sold in Baja California Sur, Mexico	Conservation Science and Practice	Isabella C. Ossiander et al.
13.	Global manta and devil ray population declines: Closing policy and management gaps to reduce fisheries mortality	Biological Conservation	Betty J.L. Laglbauer et al.
14.	First records of spinetail devil ray, <i>Mobula mobular</i> (Bonnatere, 1788), and bentfin devil ray, <i>M. thurstoni</i> (Lloyd, 1908) (Myliobatiformes, Mobulidae), in French Polynesia	Check List	Alice S. Carpentier et al.
15.	Movement ecology and foraging behaviours of oceanic manta rays <i>Mobula birostris</i> in the coastal waters of Aotearoa, New Zealand	Royal Society Open Science	Tamsin M. Cooper et al.
16.	Shining a light on Cameroon's elasmobranch fisheries: insights from citizen science and market surveys highlight a conservation priority	Environmental Biology of Fishes	Ghofrane Labyedh et al.
17.	A review of manta and devil ray courtship and mating	Environmental Biology of Fishes	Michelle Carpenter et al.
18.	Distribution of three mobulid ray species (<i>Mobula tarapacana</i> , <i>M. mobular</i> , and <i>M. thurstoni</i>) in the western Atlantic and Caribbean	Endangered Species Research	Jessica H. Pate et al.

In the Media

Online and Print Features

In 2025, we were featured in a wide range of respected media outlets, including *Forbes*, *Oceanographic Magazine*, *DIVE Magazine*, and *Discover Wildlife*. These features brought global attention to our manta and devil ray conservation work, showcasing our research breakthroughs, conservation initiatives, and educational projects in a fresh and engaging way.

163,000+

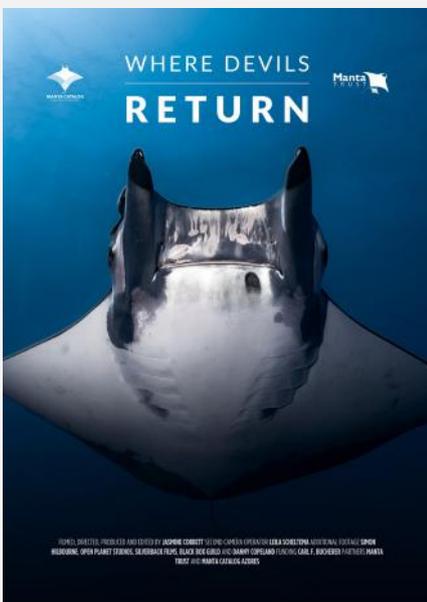
Social Media Following

In 2025, our social media following grew by 8%, significantly increasing our ability to share conservation news, raise awareness, and boost fundraising efforts.

80+

Media Publications

We had over 80 articles and media features, which significantly increased the reach of our research and conservation news.



Television Coverage

Our research and conservation efforts were highlighted on several high-profile productions, including TVNZ *Endangered Species Aotearoa* and Sky TV *Moon: Nature's Secret Force*. These broadcasts helped bring our work on manta and devil ray protection to a broad audience, demonstrating both the scientific importance and the urgency of conservation action.

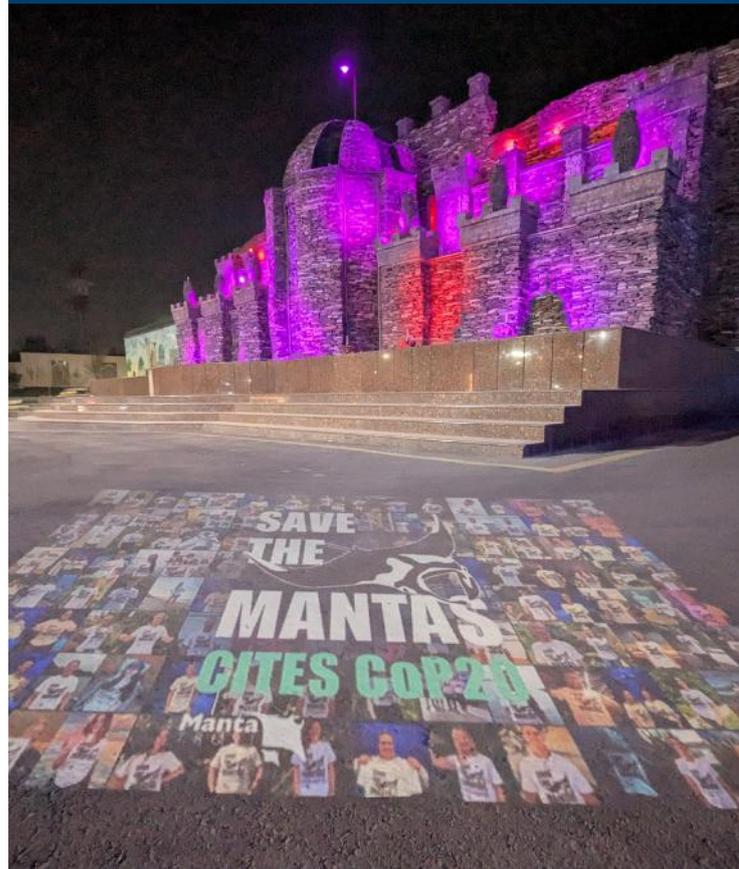
Our Own Media

We continued to produce high-quality, in-house content throughout the year, including articles for *Oceanographic Magazine* and *Scuba Diving Magazine*, the 8-part expedition video series from the Azores devil ray research expedition, and the short documentary *Where Devils Return*, following Ana Filipa Sobral and the Manta Catalog Azores team as they study and protect sicklefin devil rays. In 2025, we also launched the *Field Guide to Manta and Devil Rays of the World* in four languages, featuring a colour-coded identification system and practical tools to support accurate species identification and global conservation of these threatened rays.



Awareness and Fundraising Campaigns

It was a record year in 2025 for impact through our awareness and fundraising initiatives. Our World Manta Day #SaveTheMantas campaign was the most impactful to date, delivering over 2.6 million online views, generating more than 25,000 interactions, attracting over 1,600 new Instagram followers, and securing 10+ media features. Supporter engagement was high, with 297 prize-draw entrants raising over £8,000. As part of this campaign, we hosted the Rays of Hope in-person event in London, in partnership with Oceanographic Magazine and Finisterre, which celebrated ocean conservation and the vital role of protecting sharks and rays, engaging over 80 attendees in inspiring discussions and storytelling.



Photography and Film Awards

Our Media and Communications Manager, Jasmine Corbett, was a finalist in four major photography and film awards:

- **Collaborative Conservation** (Mobula Project Indonesia) – Finalist, *Smiley Charity Film Awards*, Indigo at the O2, London
- **Mantas of the Mexican Caribbean** – Honourable Mention, *Oceanic Global Short Film Festival*, New York
- **Mantas of the Mexican Caribbean** – Shortlist, *Better World Video Awards*, Virtual
- **Proyecto Mantas Ecuador Ep. 1** – Finalist, *Big Syn Institute Film Festival*, Curzon Mayfair, London

From global media coverage to award-nominated storytelling and our most impactful campaigns yet, 2025 was our biggest year yet for media exposure, amplified through the success of the #SaveTheMantas campaign.



Rays of Hope event in London in collaboration with Oceanographic Magazine.

Financial Report

We are very grateful to all the grant giving bodies, sponsors, and donors who continue to provide a lifeline for the Manta Trust and vicariously for our global network of research and conservation projects.



This has been a year of significant growth for the Manta Trust. We have seen an increase in support through public donations, regular giving, corporate match funds and particularly larger restricted grants. This has allowed us to support multiple affiliate projects around the world, including a group of projects in the Pacific and a new project in West and Central Africa. We have funding for a second year of the RahVeshi Programme Scholarship for young Maldivians. Thanks to the funds raised by the Manta Trust in 2025, we were able to produce a *Field Guide to Manta and Devil Rays*, cover open access fees for key scientific papers, and provide support for more PhD and Masters students conducting manta research and data collection. We extend our thanks to everyone who has donated in 2025, each contribution is vital to ensure we can continue with our manta and devil conservation efforts.



Income

£1,329,822

This year, 44% of our funds came from unrestricted sources, such as public donations, regular giving, merchandise sales and corporate match funding. We continue to diversify our income sources, working with corporate match funding programmes and increasing our marketing efforts to raise public donations and sustained regular giving. Alongside this, we have been able to secure more funding to broaden our conservation and education projects and support our core operations through restricted grants from trusts and foundations.

Expenditure

£1,129,625

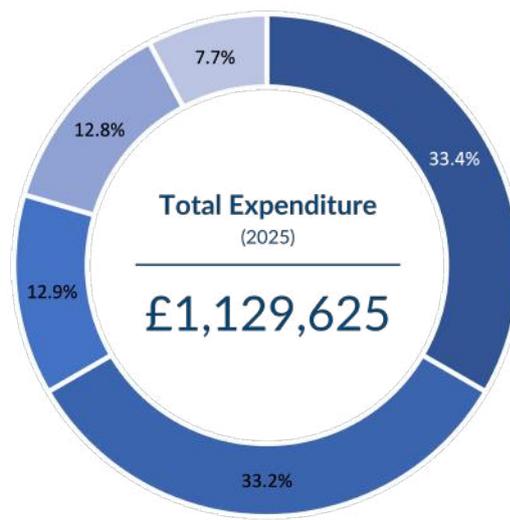
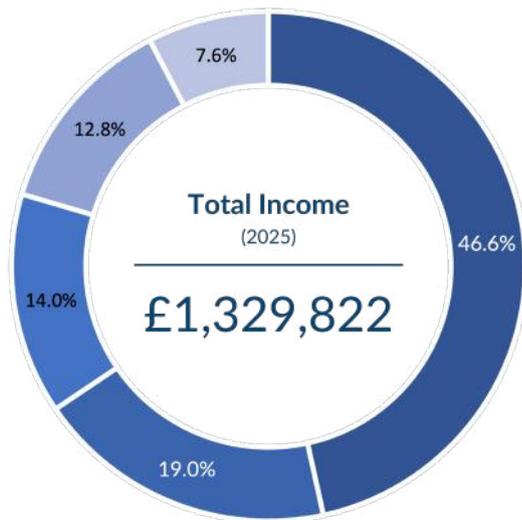
This year, 65% of our expenditure was for our Global Research and Conservation Programme, supported by our core operations team. We continued to support our flagship project, the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme and increased our expenditure on our Education and Studentship Programmes. Our restricted funds are ring-fenced for specific projects, while our unrestricted funds are allocated according to the priorities of our 5-year strategic plan with guidance from our board of trustees.

Finance Breakdown

Please note that the following figures are unaudited and approximate. For detailed financial information please view our audited [Financial Statement for 2024_25](#).

Manta Trust Reserves: To safeguard the core activities of the charity in periods of fluctuating income, the Trustees have established unrestricted reserves to cover six to twelve months of core operational costs £200,000 to £250,000. In 2025 there were adequate funds to ensure the charity was able to meet all current operational costs and some estimated possible future liabilities.

Our free reserves on 31st Dec 2025 were: £236,209 (2024: £200,675).



- Trusts and Research Grants
- Public Donations and Fundraising
- Corporate Social Responsibility Funding
- Other
- Partnership with Resorts

- Operations and Overheads
- Research and Conservation Projects
- Maldives Manta Conservation Programme
- Research Expeditions
- Other

*Our personnel are one of the greatest conservation tools at our disposal. Our core team is only small, but its influence is far reaching; as an umbrella organisation, we coordinate activities for, provide expert guidance to fundraise for, and encourage collaboration between 32 affiliated projects worldwide. Charities are often criticised for spending funds on their operations and overheads; making it difficult for charities to maintain a highly skilled core operational team and pay them a fair wage. So, we are especially grateful for the incredible support our core team has received from several progressive sponsors and donors over the years, without whom we could not continue our work.

Thank You and Summary

The success and achievements of the Manta Trust in 2025 would not have been possible without the incredible support of the following groups:



David Keens The Byers Family J Berman Memorial Foundation Wiardi Lukito Jennifer Jen
The Colven Family The Sewell Trust Irene Reynolds Philips Foundation Anonymous Foundation
Daniel Roozen The Loke-Hassell Family The Paulus Family Cindy Sanborn and Beth Ann Andrews

Closing remarks from the Director of Conservation Programmes

The successful inclusion of all manta and devil rays in Appendix I of CITES in 2025 stands as a powerful testament to what true collaboration can achieve in conservation. This milestone is the culmination of more than two decades of rigorous scientific research, dedicated policy engagement, strategic communications, and tireless fundraising. It reflects the collective strength of researchers, advocates, partners, and supporters around the world united by a shared vision. The Manta Trust model shows that when expertise is connected, partnerships are nurtured, and efforts are amplified through a trusted global platform, ambition can be transformed into meaningful protection for threatened species.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who has supported this journey so far – whether by donating, adopting a manta ray, joining a Manta Expedition, purchasing our merchandise, supporting our crowdfunding campaigns, or taking part in our Cross the Oceans challenge. We would like to give a special mention to our Patrons who have been extremely supportive over 2025, helping us to highlight our special events and using their unique platforms to raise awareness of the Manta Trust. Thank you also to our Trustees for guiding and supporting the core operational team as we continue to grow and develop the charity, and to the Action for Mantas Board (our partner registered 501(c)(3)) for their continued support of us and our US-based supporters. Thanks also to Manta Expeditions for helping us get our researchers into the field while raising much-needed funds for our work.

Without the support of our cyclone members, commercial partners, and our growing global community of supporters, none of this work would have been possible. Your commitment is incredibly inspiring, and we are grateful to every one of you.

But this milestone is not the finish line; it is the starting point. Now comes the critical work of turning policy into protection: uncovering illegal trade routes, securing national protections in key fishing nations, strengthening enforcement on the ground, and developing new technologies to reduce bycatch. The next chapter begins now, in 2026, and we hope you will continue to support us as we carry this vital mission forward.



Bex Carter
Director of Conservation Programmes



Reef manta rays on a cleaning station in the Maldives.



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Impact Report 2025

[The Manta Trust](#)

The Manta Trust is a registered charity in England & Wales (Charity Number 1145387).

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