



MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu



ANNUAL REPORT

2025

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OUR

# MISSION

To lead the tourism industry in the Maldives through meaningful marine conservation efforts based on research, education and community outreach.

OUR

# VISION

A local and global community of marine stewards that will create a culture of positive action for our oceans in Laamu and beyond.





# OUR STORY

As pressures on our oceans continue to grow, 2025 has been a year defined by progress, innovation, and resilience for the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) and Six Senses Laamu. Building on more than a decade of conservation, this year saw our teams expand their science, strengthen community connections, and enhance our role as a leader in regenerative tourism in the Maldives.

One of the most impactful stories of 2025 has been the evolution of the SHELL. What began as an ambitious idea has now become a thriving hub of research, education, and guest engagement—earning praise from renowned conservationists and becoming a cornerstone of meaningful travel

in Laamu. With the integration of our above-ground coral nursery, the SHELL has grown into a living example of how science can be accessible, interactive, and inspiring for all ages. This year alone, we welcomed thousands of guests, hosts, and community members through its doors, each leaving with a deeper connection to the ocean.

2025 also marked a major step forward for coral restoration and reef resilience. Our coral team developed Laamu's first micro-fragmentation programme, scaling up our ability to rescue and restore slow-growing massive corals—critical species in a changing climate. Alongside this, the expansion of our coral ID database and continued larval restoration work highlight our long-term commitment to safeguarding Laamu's reefs for the future.

Across the team, our partners continued to elevate science and conservation in remarkable ways. The Manta Trust deepened our understanding of Laamu's uniquely resident manta population through continued use of Eyes on the Reef camera systems, fine-scale behavioural studies, and long-term demographic monitoring. The Olive Ridley Project celebrated another successful year of turtle



nesting, Photo-ID, and community-led conservation, while Maldives Resilient Reefs advanced fisheries research, seagrass protection, and launched MUI's first ever shark research project. Together, our partners have helped position Laamu as a model for integrated, multi-disciplinary conservation in the Maldives.

Our community work grew in meaningful new directions. We strengthened relationships across islands, empowered youth leaders, and expanded opportunities for students to experience the ocean for the first time. Through festivals, snorkel events, screenings, trainings, and school partnerships, we continue to see firsthand how knowledge can inspire action—and how Laamu's young conservationists are shaping the future of their atoll.

This year, our achievements were also supported by the momentum behind our resort's OECM designation, which will formally recognise Six Senses Laamu as a nationally acknowledged private conservation area, once allocated. This reflects not only our scientific and environmental commitments, but also our role in helping the Maldives meet global biodiversity goals.

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the generosity and belief of our supporters. We extend our deepest gratitude to **HPL Hotels & Resorts, the Six Senses family, our passionate guests, the Laamu community, our partner NGOs, and our global network of scientists and storytellers.** Your collaboration and shared vision continue to transform challenges into opportunities and ensure that Laamu remains a beacon of hope for marine conservation.

As you read the MUI 2025 Annual Report, I hope you feel inspired by the progress we have made—and by the passion, dedication, and curiosity that drive our work every day. Together, we are building a brighter, more resilient future for Laamu, for the Maldives, and for our oceans.

**#WithLoveFromLaamu**

**Marteyne Van Well**  
Regional General Manager  
Six Senses Maldives



MALDIVES UNDERWATER INITIATIVE by Six Senses Laamu

# WHO IS MUI?

The Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) is a multiple award-winning marine conservation initiative based at Six Senses Laamu. Situated in a Mission Blue Hope Spot, Six Senses Laamu is a five-star resort in Laamu Atoll who created MUI to unite the partnerships it has with various marine conservation organizations.



SIX SENSES  
LAAMU



15 years of sustainable tourism

## SIX SENSES LAAMU

Six Senses Laamu, the home base of the Maldives Underwater Initiative, sets itself apart from the 200+ other resorts in the Maldives with its dedication to sustainability and marine conservation. MUI is an initiative by Six Senses Laamu, providing the team with a base, funding and the resources required to achieve research, education and community goals.

Six Senses Laamu has been a Fellow Member of the Long Run since 2017. This is a certified membership organization of nature-based tourism businesses committed to driving sustainability through Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce (4Cs). Six Senses Laamu is also a partner of The Reef-World Foundation, and abide by their Green Fins sustainable dive and snorkel code of conduct.

# PARTNERS

## WITHIN MUI

### THE MANTA TRUST

The Manta Trust is a UK-registered charity that coordinates global mobulid research and conservation efforts. Their mission is to conserve mobulid rays and their habitats, through research, education and collaboration. Since 2014, the Manta Trust have been working in Laamu to study the local manta ray population and to educate guests, hosts and the local community about the importance and vulnerability of manta rays in the Maldives.

### BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION / MALDIVES RESILIENT REEFS

Blue Marine Foundation (Blue Marine) exists to combat overfishing by delivering practical conservation solutions, including the creation of large-scale marine reserves. Since 2016, the Blue Marine team at Six Senses Laamu has been working closely with the local community on Laamu Atoll to improve local fisheries management and create functional marine reserves. A significant milestone in 2020 was the establishment of the local NGO, Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR). Over the past four years, with Blue Marine's continued support, MRR has strengthened its governance and operational capability to independently manage projects, still benefiting from Blue Marine's expertise.

### THE OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

The Olive Ridley Project (ORP) works to protect sea turtles and their habitats through research, rescue and conservation medicine as well as education, and community outreach. Since 2018, they've been studying both foraging and nesting sea turtle populations in Laamu, along with crucial habitats like coral reefs and seagrass beds, to better inform conservation action. ORP also actively removes ghost nets from the atoll and surrounding waters, ensuring safer waters for marine animals. A big part of their work in Laamu is outreach and education, with a focus on grassroots conservation through initiatives like the Sea Turtle Ranger Programme. Undertaken in partnership with the Maldivian government, the programme involves local communities in protecting key nesting beaches, especially on islands like Gadhoo and Maavah.





# WITH LOVE FROM LAAMU

MUI's work across Six Senses Laamu and the wider Laamu Atoll is made possible through the generosity, trust, and collaboration of our supporters. We offer our sincere thanks to Six Senses, our owners the HPL Group, and the many guests who return to us each year—curious, engaged, and committed to learning more about our ocean. We are especially grateful to our General Manager, Marteyne, whose unwavering passion for marine conservation continues to guide and energise our team.

We would also like to acknowledge our close partners

at Six Senses Laamu—the Manta Trust, Blue Marine Foundation, and the Olive Ridley Project. Through our shared efforts, we are creating meaningful and lasting progress for the marine life and communities of Laamu.

Our appreciation extends to the people of Laamu, particularly the Atoll Council, for welcoming us so openly and for continually inspiring change within their own communities. Finally, we thank our international network of scientists, storytellers, research institutions, and partner organisations whose expertise and dedication play a vital role in bringing MUI's vision to life.



# THE SUSTAINABILITY FUND

The environmental and community impacts highlighted in this report are made possible through the Six Senses Sustainability Fund. As a brand-wide initiative, each Six Senses property manages its own Fund to support projects that benefit the local environment and community. At Six Senses Laamu, the Sustainability Fund is generated through 0.5% of total resort revenue, 50% of house-bottled water sales, 100% of soft-toy mascot sales, and generous contributions from our guests.

Many of our initiatives are further strengthened by external donations made through our partner NGOs, enabling

specialised research, education, and community projects throughout the Laamu Atoll.

In 2025, Six Senses Laamu continued to invest in projects that deliver positive outcomes for people, wildlife, and ecosystems. A significant portion of this investment supported MUI's growing portfolio of research, education, and community-driven work. By choosing to stay with us, guests not only experience the beauty of our marine environment—they also directly contribute to its protection and long-term resilience through the Sustainability Fund.

# BUILDING BRIDGES: OUR COLLABORATORS



Founded in 2018, MUI continues to thrive on collaboration. What began with Six Senses Laamu and three partner NGOs has grown into a global network of experts, advancing research, education, and community engagement.

In 2025, MUI welcomed leading marine researchers, conservationists, storytellers,

and innovators to the island, each bringing knowledge, passion, and inspiration that drives real-world impact. Through these partnerships, MUI remains at the forefront of ocean conservation, turning expertise and creativity into meaningful change for the marine ecosystems and communities we serve.

## AMERICAS

**Dr. Christine Ward-Paige**  
E-Oceans  
(Megafauna Data)

**Dr. Sylvia Earle & Team**  
Mission Blue  
(Hope Spots and Marine Protection)

**Joel & Jen Penner**  
NewMediaSoup  
(Underwater Photographers & Videographers)

**Erin Quigley**  
GoAskErin  
(Underwater Photographer)

## AFRICA

**ABALOBI**  
(Fisheries management)

## EUROPE

**Ray Rochester**  
Yorkshire Reefs  
**Prof Marie-Aude Genain**  
Cambridge University  
(Manta Ray Reproduction)

**Dr Holly East & Dr. Matt Floyd**  
University of Northumbria  
(Sediment Dynamics, Seagrass mapping)

**Innoenergy**  
(Renewable Energy)

**Vincent & Joe Thomas**  
Aquarium Connections  
(Coral Runways)

**Matt Drysdale**  
Coral Consultant  
(Coral Taxonomy)

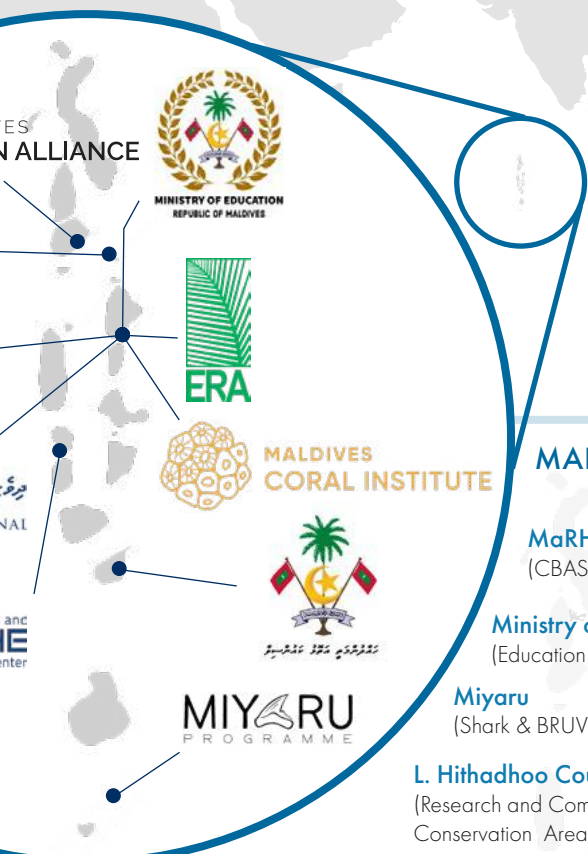
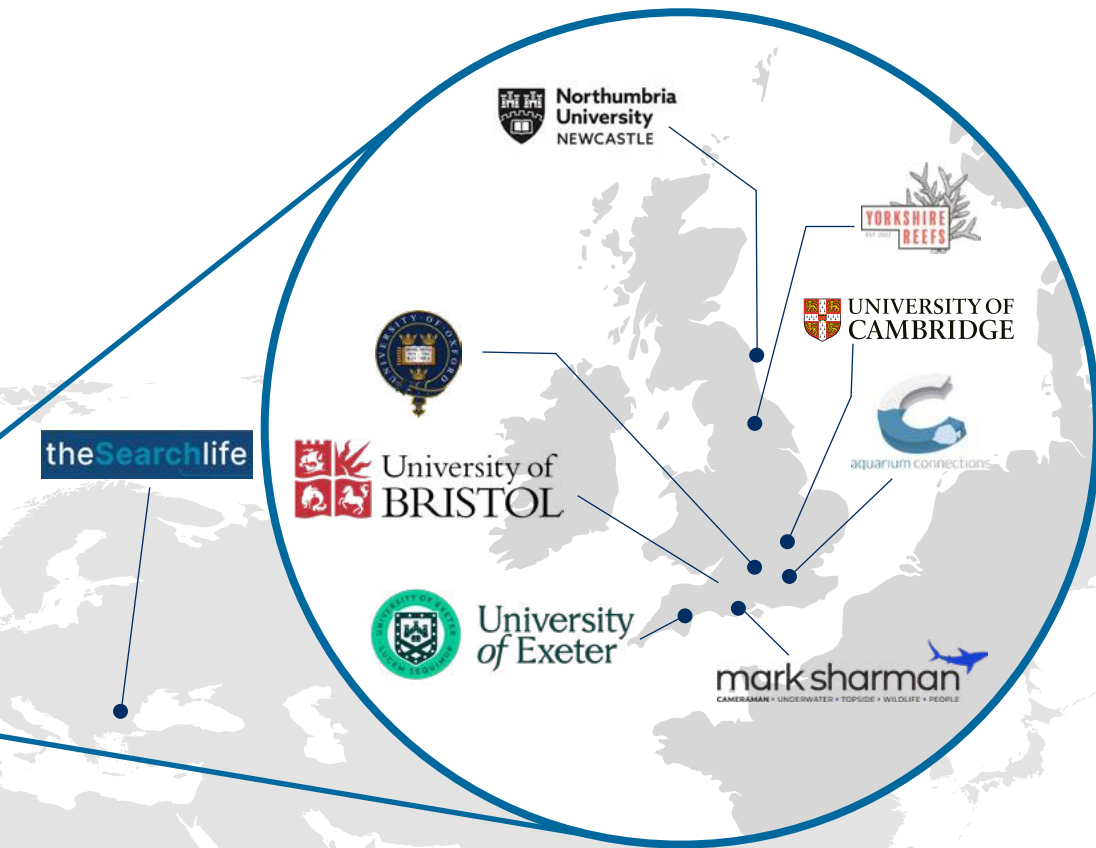
**Dr. Rhiannon Davies**  
University of Exeter  
(Coral Research)

**Prof. Steve Simpson & Jess Hodge**  
University of Bristol  
(Bioacoustics)

**Mark Sharman**  
(Underwater Videographer)

**Steve Backshall**  
(Science Communication)

**Alex Mustard**  
(Underwater Photographer)

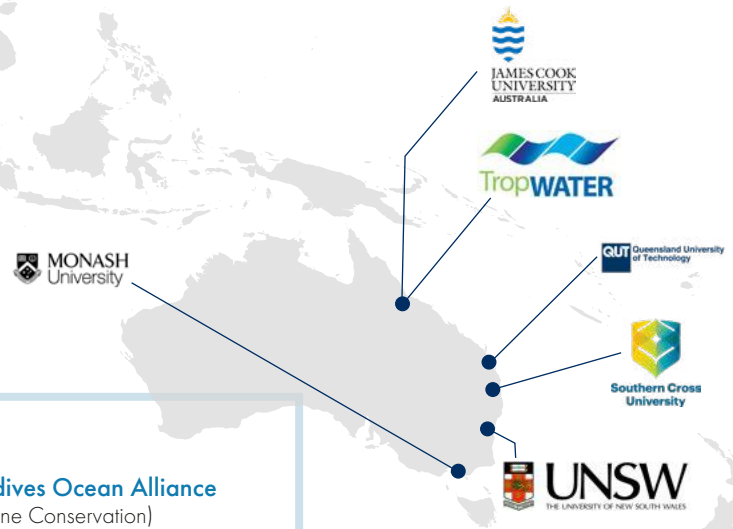


**MALDIVES**

- Maldives Ocean Alliance**  
(Marine Conservation)
- Dr Ahmed Riyaz Jauharee**  
**Maldives National University**  
(Marine Conservation)
- Laamu Atoll Women Development Committees**  
(Community Outreach and Education)
- Laamu Atoll Council**  
(Community Outreach and Education)
- Environmental Regulation Authority Maldives**  
(Marine Protection)
- Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources**  
(Permits)
- Ministry of Tourism**  
(OECM Application)

- James Cordery**  
**Six Senses Kanuhura**  
(Marine Conservation)
- Athif Mohamed**  
**Atoll Marine Centre**  
(Hawksbills in the Seagrass)
- Rosalie Bailie**  
**Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu**  
(Hawksbills in the Seagrass)

- MarRHE Centre**  
(CBASS Workshop)
- Ministry of Education**  
(Education Programs)
- Miyaru**  
(Shark & BRUV Research)
- Secretariat of Maavah Council**
- Secretariat of Fonadhoo Council**  
**Maldives Marine Research Institute**  
(Reef monitoring)
- Maldives Coral Institute**  
(Coral Restoration)



**AUSTRALIA**

- Prof. Peter L. Harrison**  
**Southern Cross University**  
(Larval Restoration)
- Dr. Paul York, Prof. Michael Rasheed**  
**Associate Prof. Mike Van Keulen**  
**James Cook University / TropWATER**  
(Seagrass)
- Rae Read**  
**Monash University**  
(OECM Research)
- Prof Matt Dunbabin, Serena Mou**  
**Queensland University of Technology**  
(Coral Reproduction Robotics)
- Dr Jordan Gacutan**  
**University of South Wales**  
(UNESCO Biosphere Reserve)

# THE BIGGER PICTURE: 2025 IN NUMBERS



14,545

moments of  
education shared  
with guests



3,119

moments of  
education shared  
with the community

MUI's projects aim to contribute to a wide range of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our work aims to have the biggest impact in the following SDGs:

14 LIFE  
BELOW WATER



13 CLIMATE  
ACTION



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



4 QUALITY  
EDUCATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND  
CLEAN ENERGY





701

moments of education  
shared with hosts



1,748

hatchlings successfully  
made it to the ocean



1,048,318

coral larvae grown and  
released

5 GENDER  
EQUALITY



3 GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



12 RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



6 CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



10 REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



# HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

First Microfraged Corals  
Planted on Reef

Ghost Net  
Removed

Oceanic Manta  
Sighted



JANUARY



MARCH



MAY

FEBRUARY



First Turtle Nest of  
the Year

APRIL



Special  
Guests Visit

JUNE



Celebrated World  
Environment Day

MUI joined Lhaviyani Turtle Festival

Launch of Seagrass Industry Leaders

Mass Coral Spawning Returns to Laamu

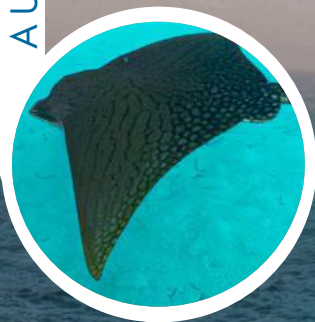


JULY

SEPTEMBER

NOVEMBER

AUGUST



Ornate Eagle Ray Sighted

OCTOBER



Grouper Surveys Start

DECEMBER



MUI Celebrate Festival

# OUR RESEARCH

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. The scene is dimly lit, with light filtering through the water. In the foreground on the right, a diver's hand is visible, holding a GoPro camera. The camera is pointed towards the left, capturing the reef. The diver's hand is also holding a small piece of yellowish food. The background shows a vast expanse of coral reef with various types of coral and several fish swimming in the water. The overall atmosphere is serene and focused on marine research.



# MEGAFAUNA SIGHTINGS

## 3 NEW SURVEY TYPES



Drone Surveys



Kayaking



Baited Remote Underwater Videos  
(BRUVs) \*data will be released in 2026 by MRR



**34,966** megafauna sightings



**5,322** sightings of turtles



**1,215** sightings of Napoleon wrasse



**11,597** sightings of sharks



**35%** of megafauna sighted are Endangered or Critically Endangered



**5,748** sightings of rays



# LAAMU: A HOME FOR ENI

## CRITICALLY ENDANGERED



1808 Hawksbill  
Turtles



9 Ornate  
Eagle Rays



6 Giant Guitarfish



2 Bowmouth  
Guitarfish

## ENDANGERED



1215 Napoleon  
Wrasse



5560 Grey Reef  
Sharks



3226 Spotted  
Eagle Rays



2 Whale Sharks

## VULNERABLE



4937 Whitetip  
Reef Sharks



923 Blacktip  
Reef Sharks



677 Pink  
Whip Rays



730 Reef  
Manta Rays

## NEAR THREATENED



2 Tiger Sharks



721 Indo-Pacific  
Bottlenose Dolphins



738 Cowtail  
Rays

## LEAST CONCERN



9013 Spinner  
Dolphins



3514 Green  
Turtles

# DANGERED MEGAFAUNA

The Laamu Megafauna Project is a rare long term monitoring program operating from 2017 to the present, documenting megafauna sightings across Laamu Atoll through snorkelling, SCUBA diving, and other survey methods. The dataset has directly informed the designation of Marine Protected Areas, Important Shark and Ray Areas, and was instrumental in the recognition of Laamu as a Mission Blue Hope Spot in 2021. Currently, project data are being used in collaboration with Maldives Resilient Reefs to support the designation of five Environmentally Significant Areas and one proposed Community Conservation Area. These sites are considered critical for the conservation and long-term resilience of marine ecosystems throughout the atoll.



4 Oceanic Manta Rays



4 Zebra Sharks



71 Mangrove Whip Rays



115 Porcupine Stingray



103 Round Ribbontail Rays



34 Tawny Nurse Sharks



125 Silvertip Sharks



8 Lemon Sharks



Based on global classifications from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, 37.3% of recorded sightings were classified as Least Concern, 4.4% as Near Threatened, 22.4% as Vulnerable, 30.4% as Endangered, and 5.2% as Critically Endangered. Results of this project demonstrate that Laamu is an ecologically important area harboring a diverse range of threatened species.

The proportion of Endangered and Critically Endangered sightings decreased from 53.3% in 2024 to 35.6% in 2025. This change is largely attributable to the reassessment of the green sea turtle from Endangered to Least Concern at a global level. While this reflects positive global population trends and is a victory for sea turtle conservation efforts, regional assessments differ. The Olive Ridley Project highlighted the following:

"In the North Indian Ocean, green turtles are still listed as Vulnerable overall, and in the Maldives, they remain listed as Endangered. These local and regional disparities remind us that progress in one part of the world does not mean security everywhere."

# HEALTHY REEFS AND HEALTHY SHARKS

Many species of sharks call the reefs and seagrass beds of Laamu home. However, these habitats are under constant threat from climate change and human impacts. Abundant shark populations serve as a vital indicator of healthy reefs and thriving marine habitats. When shark numbers decline, it signals deeper problems within the ecosystem. Since the Maldives was deemed a shark sanctuary in 2010 and Six Senses Laamu began collecting megafauna data in 2017, there has been a steady increase in shark sightings. This increase in shark sightings is not only a positive sign for marine health but also for local eco-tourism industries that rely on the presence of sharks.

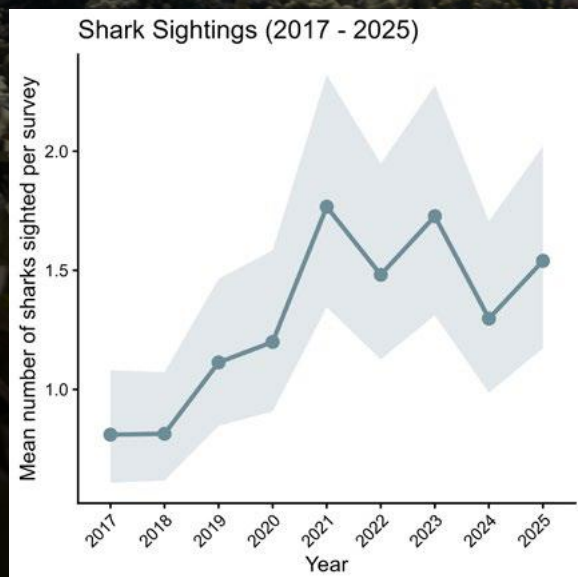
While the overall shark sightings have been positive

long-term, 2024 saw a 25% decrease in shark sightings compared to the previous year. This pattern may be a result of multiple complex and interacting variables. For example, a decrease in 2024 may be attributed to the mass coral bleaching event that affected Laamu's reefs in 2024. Coral bleaching, caused by rising water temperatures, stresses the reefs and forces many marine species, including sharks, to move away in search of healthier environments. The decline observed in 2024 may highlight the ecological partnership between reef conditions and shark presence and emphasizes how quickly these systems can be disrupted (Williamson et al. 2024). This disruption has implications that reach far beyond marine biodiversity. An estimated one billion



people worldwide directly or indirectly rely on healthy coral reefs (Sing Wong et al. 2022). When coral reefs decline, the consequences impact human health, local economies and industries such as tourism.

Following the recovery of Laamu's reefs, shark sightings increased in 2025. This indicates that with healthy reefs, proper protection, and effective management, these species can rebound. However, the decline observed in 2024 serves as a reminder that our oceans are fragile. Continued monitoring and consistent protection measures are essential in allowing our sharks, coral reefs and communities to continue to thrive.

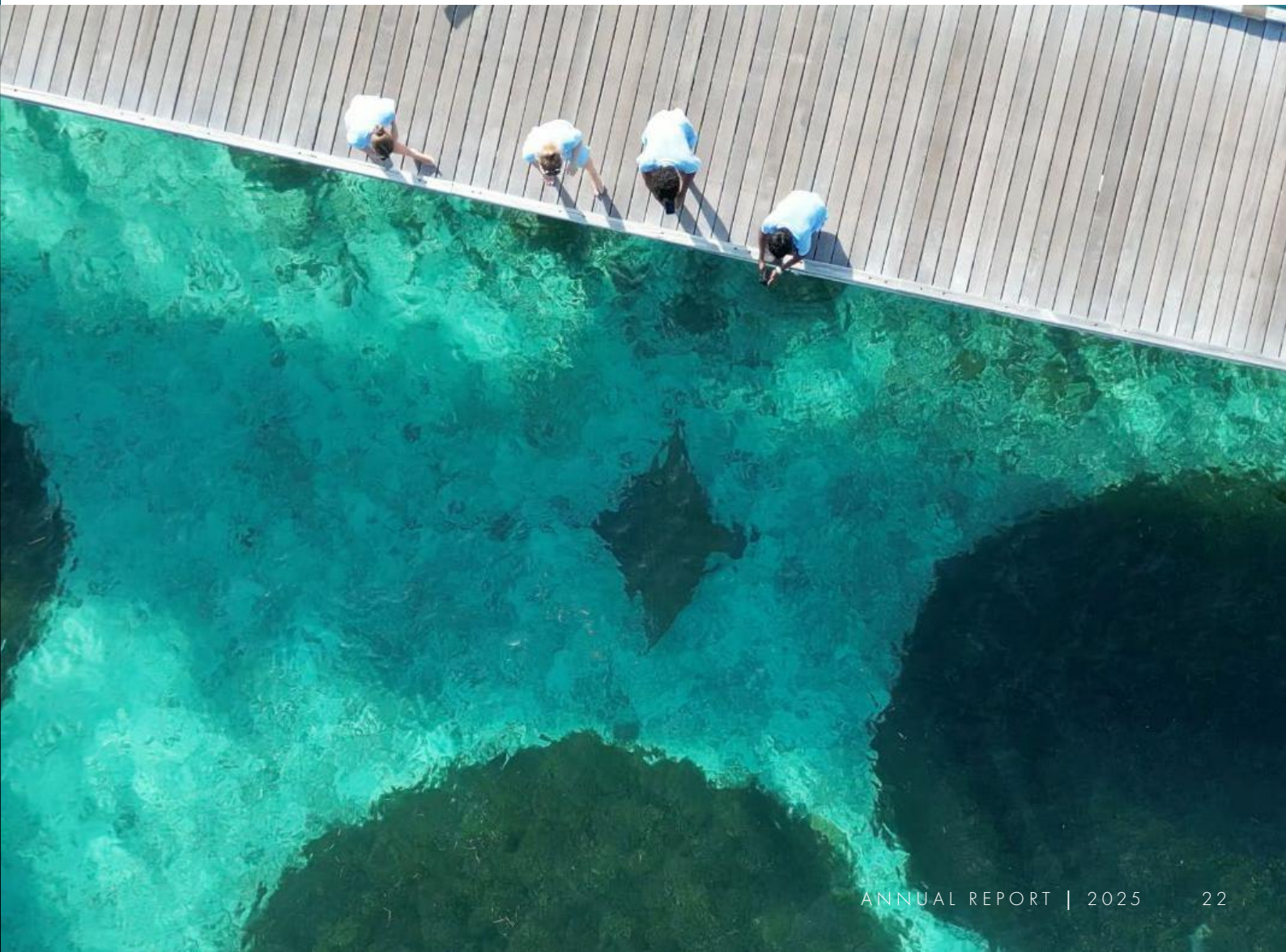


# THE UNICORN OF THE SEA CALLS LAAMU HOME

The Ornate Eagle Ray is classified as Critically Endangered and is widely regarded as one of the rarest ray species globally. In 2025, nine sightings were recorded in Laamu Atoll, representing a threefold increase compared to previous years. Photo identification has confirmed at least one individual, named Thuthu, first identified by MUI biologist Afaaz Zahid in 2024. A second smaller individual has also been observed but has not yet been photographed and identified.

The rise in Ornate Eagle Ray sightings raises several important questions, including whether individuals are using Laamu Atoll more frequently or whether improved awareness, increased survey effort, and greater reporting by guests and staff are driving higher detection rates. Key uncertainties remain regarding movement patterns when

the species is not observed and the criteria required to consider individuals resident within the atoll. While it is too early to draw conclusions, protected seagrass habitats may be providing an important sanctuary, as they do for other megafauna species. Expanded citizen science engagement, aerial drone surveys, and data collection are expected to support clearer insights in 2026.





# ON THE PATH OF BECOMING AN OECEM

The protection of our natural environment is of vital importance. It is within nature that we find food, medicine, wellness, and for many of us meaning in our lives. But humans have been excellent at damaging and destroying natural areas for a variety of reasons. This is why various international agreements have been made to protect natural sites, such as the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, and a general agreement amongst countries to protect 30% of their natural environment by 2030.

As such, this year has had a big push from government and international groups to officially protect a variety of natural areas. Nationally designated Protected and Conserved Areas are just one way to commit environments to this goal, but it is only applied to public spaces. With over 180 resorts, the Maldives has a wealth of land and water that is under the jurisdiction of private industry, and as such, a method for recognizing the conservation of these private areas has been developed over multiple years. These areas are known as "Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures" (OECMs).

Six Senses Laamu has been working closely with the government to develop how the OECM framework can be effectively and meaningfully applied to the Maldives. After multiple years and many updates, the national government is in the final stages of designating its first resort OECMs, of which Six Senses Laamu will be. The two broad requirements are an ecological survey

encompassing all habitats that are within the boundary, for us that is seagrass and coral reefs, and a management plan detailing how the resort will operate to either reduce negative impact or promote regenerative impact. Six Senses Laamu effectively operates as a marine sanctuary, with no take of any animal or resource from our waters, no damaging activities and no pollution (light, sound, chemical) of our environment. The OECM is one of the ways that Six Senses Laamu is having its regenerative initiatives and operations officially recognized by the government and able to contribute to the nation's Protected Area commitment.

As one of the lead stakeholders in the OECM process, representatives from Six Senses Laamu have presented the process by which we have developed our supporting documents and the operational considerations required by the resort management team. Our process has also been documented by PhD candidate, Rae Read, who is analysing the Maldives' framework and its implementation.

To date, Six Senses Laamu is one of two candidate OECMs in the Maldives. In 2026, we hope to become the Nation's first OECM, and continue to act as a role model, inspiring responsible environmental guardianship by tourism operators.



# SEAGRASS ECOLOGY





Photo credits @ Alex Mustard

# PROTECTING SEAGRASS IN A TOURISM LANDSCAPE

**Seagrass meadows are declining globally. As a consequence, their vital roles including supporting marine biodiversity, protecting coastlines, and storing significant amounts of carbon is at risk.**

Deviating from global trends, the Maldives has emerged as a rare seagrass “bright spot,” where meadows have shown signs of expansion rather than widespread loss. However, the Maldives faces a unique conservation challenge, where seagrass is frequently removed from resort lagoons for aesthetic reasons. This is driven by the perception that clear, sandy lagoons are more appealing to tourists. More than half of Maldivian resorts actively remove seagrass meadows, often by smothering them with plastic tarpaulins to prevent regrowth. These practices threaten local marine ecosystems and undermine national sustainability and climate goals.

In response to these challenges, Blue Marine Foundation, now locally established as Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR), partnered with Six Senses Laamu in 2019 to launch the Protect Maldives Seagrass campaign. The initiative aimed to increase awareness of the ecological importance of seagrass and to advocate for its protection within resort environments. Since then, Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) and MRR have worked with resort guests and local communities to improve understanding of seagrass ecosystems and their benefits. In 2025, MRR further advanced this work through the establishment of the Seagrass Industry Leaders Circle, encouraging leadership and best practice within the tourism sector.

At Six Senses Laamu, seagrass has been fully integrated into the resort’s sustainability approach by MUI. In 2025, approximately 385,000 m<sup>2</sup> of seagrass surrounds the resort, with 100% protected from removal. These meadows are estimated to store 6,396 metric tonnes of carbon, while providing essential habitat for a wide range of marine species.

MUI is currently undertaking a study to assess ecological changes in seagrass meadows following protection in 2019, alongside attitudes of local communities and resort guests toward seagrass ecosystems.

**Preliminary findings from the study indicate:**

- An increase in seagrass meadow extent between 2019 and 2025
- Healthy seagrass condition
- Doubled megafauna within seagrass habitats
- >90% positive resort guest perceptions of seagrass
- Positive shifts in local community attitudes following targeted education sessions

The study is expected to be completed and published in 2026, and provide evidence that luxury tourism can coexist with healthy seagrass ecosystems. We will provide the first longitudinal assessment of tourism-driven seagrass protection in the Maldives and demonstrate how resort operations can successfully integrate conservation, education, and habitat protection.

While seagrass meadows at Six Senses Laamu are thriving, and national trends remain encouraging, the future of these ecosystems remain uncertain. Changing environmental conditions and harmful human activities continue to pose risks, and seagrass loss has already been reported in some areas of the Maldives, with negative ecological and tourism impacts. Sustained and expanded protection efforts are therefore essential to ensure that seagrass ecosystems continue to support biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable tourism across the Maldives.

*"I've been snorkelling all around the world, and this is hands down the best snorkeling of my life. Today alone I saw three different types of stingrays, two different types of turtles and sharks, which I've never seen before!" - guest survey after a seagrass snorkel.*



**385,000 m<sup>2</sup>**

of protected seagrass at  
Six Senses Laamu

Photo credits @ Owen Bornhorst

# SEAGRASS MAPPING DRONE TRAINING

In the third quarter of 2025, a hands-on workshop equipped participants with skills in safe drone operation, flight planning, ground control, ground truthing, and high-resolution map generation using tools such as DroneDeploy. The workshop also initiated the collaborative development of a national drone mapping protocol, with participants from government agencies, NGOs, the tourism sector, and academic institutions, including Southern Cross University, MRR, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Environmental Protection Agency, Maldives Marine Research Institute, and Water Solutions. The drone-based seagrass monitoring protocol has been developed to standardize and enhance seagrass mapping across the Maldives, ensuring that drone operations are safe, accurate, and compliant with legal and insurance requirements. Imagery is currently being collected in L. Hithadhoo to monitor changes over time within the CCA. Additional drone surveys will be conducted at resorts in the Seagrass Industry Leader Circle to track changes in seagrass coverage over time.



# OUR CORALS



Photo credits @ Alex Mustard



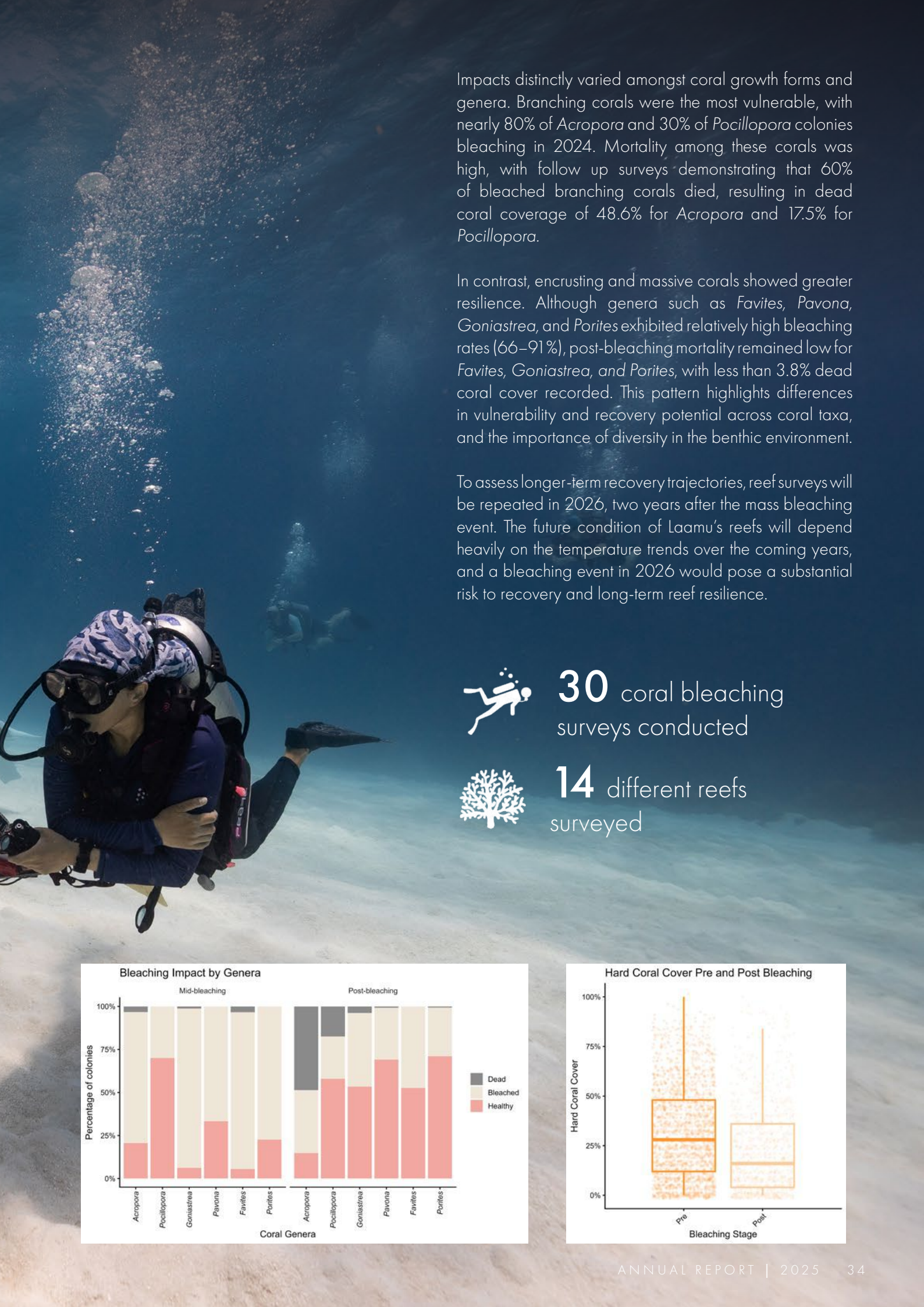
# REEFS AT RISK, WITH HOPE FOR RESILIENCE

Coral reefs worldwide are increasingly threatened by the combined effects of natural and human-driven pressures, particularly rising sea temperatures associated with climate change.

In April and May 2024, the Maldives experienced a significant mass coral bleaching event linked to a global El Niño, amplified by long-term ocean warming. Coral bleaching occurs when elevated water temperatures cause physiological stress, leading corals to expel their symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae), which provide, both, colour and a substantial proportion of their energy. Without these algae, corals lose their colouring, and are

highly susceptible to disease, starvation and mortality. Beyond ecological consequences, coral degradation poses direct risks to local livelihoods that depend on healthy reefs.

During the 2024 bleaching event, approximately 65% of surveyed coral colonies showed signs of bleaching. Follow-up reef surveys conducted in 2025 assessed the impacts following this disturbance. Live coral cover declined significantly, decreasing from an average of 31.2% prior to bleaching to 22.9% per transect one year later.



Impacts distinctly varied amongst coral growth forms and genera. Branching corals were the most vulnerable, with nearly 80% of *Acropora* and 30% of *Pocillopora* colonies bleaching in 2024. Mortality among these corals was high, with follow up surveys demonstrating that 60% of bleached branching corals died, resulting in dead coral coverage of 48.6% for *Acropora* and 17.5% for *Pocillopora*.

In contrast, encrusting and massive corals showed greater resilience. Although genera such as *Favites*, *Pavona*, *Goniastrea*, and *Porites* exhibited relatively high bleaching rates (66–91%), post-bleaching mortality remained low for *Favites*, *Goniastrea*, and *Porites*, with less than 3.8% dead coral cover recorded. This pattern highlights differences in vulnerability and recovery potential across coral taxa, and the importance of diversity in the benthic environment.

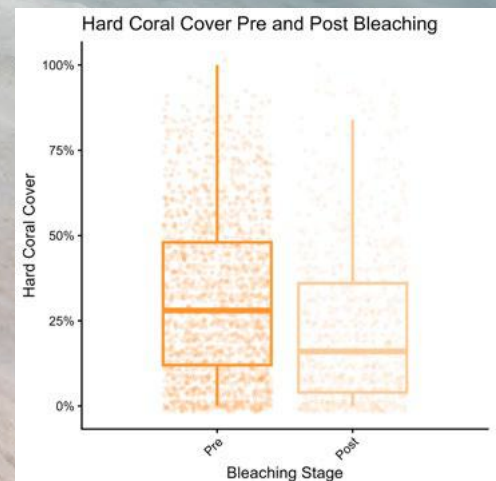
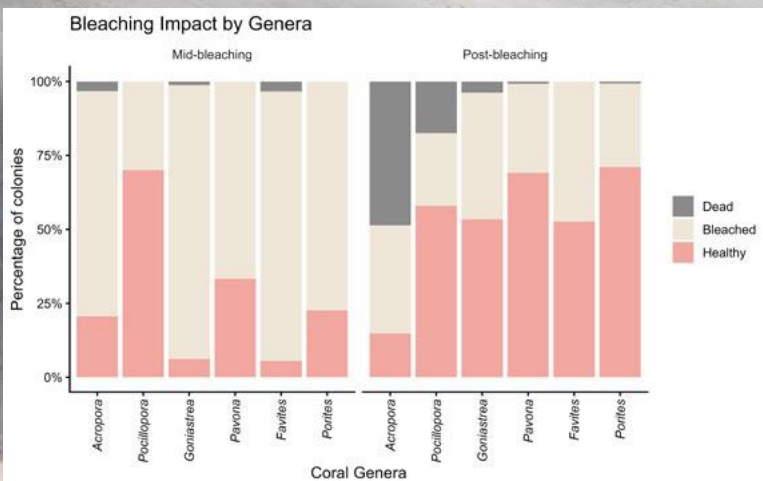
To assess longer-term recovery trajectories, reef surveys will be repeated in 2026, two years after the mass bleaching event. The future condition of Laamu’s reefs will depend heavily on the temperature trends over the coming years, and a bleaching event in 2026 would pose a substantial risk to recovery and long-term reef resilience.



**30** coral bleaching surveys conducted



**14** different reefs surveyed



# CORAL CLONING IN THE CORAL COVE

The year began with our corals still compromised, following the 2024 mass coral bleaching event. As a result, early 2025 was spent conducting post-bleaching surveys to track reef recovery while focusing on ecological changes, live coral cover, and overall coral health. These surveys revealed that some reefs were recovering well, but others showed severe degradation and were overgrown with algae. This emphasized the importance of preserving healthy reefs and addressing the increasing impacts of climate change.

The surveys also served as baseline data for an anticipated 2025 mass bleaching event. As bleaching occurred in various parts of the world like Australia, concerns grew that the Maldives might once again be at risk. Fortunately, our reefs were not affected this year and were able to continue recovering. However, this does not mean our coral reefs are in the clear. Environmental conditions are expected to worsen if environmental stressors intensify, which stresses the need for collaboration between governments, scientific innovation, and immediate action. These

findings reinforced the urgency of strengthening reef resilience, which is why 2025 marked the official launch of our newest restoration initiative: coral micro-fragmentation. While larval restoration remains crucial for maintaining genetic diversity, it requires several years before the young corals mature enough to contribute to reef recovery. Micro-fragmentation dramatically speeds up this process by cutting a mature coral into smaller pieces and triggering a healing response that allows each fragment to grow into a full-sized colony much faster. In turn, these colonies reach maturity sooner, begin spawning earlier, and support the natural reproductive cycle of the reef. This method is preferred to coral-line nurseries used elsewhere because it increases biodiversity: instead of working only with branching species, we can restore massive corals as well—corals that are more robust, resilient, and long-lived.

A micro-fragmentation session begins with collecting previously broken pieces of coral from the house reef. These fragments are then brought back to the lab





using a specialized saw and adhered to porcelain plugs. Once ready, the plugs are placed in our 'Coral Cove' system to grow until they are large enough to return to the reef. This timeline can range from a couple of months to over a year, depending on the species' natural growth rate. Once the fragments have developed, the team conducts coral-planting dives. Each plug is placed into a natural crevice in the reef and secured with putty to ensure it can grow and attach. With continued success, we hope every fragment raised in the Coral Cove will thrive on the reef.

To date, 206 coral fragments have been successfully planted back onto the reef, despite minor challenges that were expected during our first year. For example, algae growth in Coral Cove initially hindered fragment development, but introducing natural grazers helped keep the algae levels under control. Additionally, several fragments began bleaching, due to a crab that found its way into the system; once removed, the issue resolved, and our increased monitoring has prevented further intruders from causing damage. These experiences have strengthened our protocols and improved conditions for future coral production.



**18** hours of  
Microfragmentation



**2,447** coral fragments  
growing in the Coral Cove

# A CORAL SPAWNING EXPERIENCE

One of the biggest projects at MUI is coral larval restoration, as part of our Collaborative for Reefs in Laamu (CRL) project, which launched in March 2023. This initiative aims to restore degraded coral reefs in Laamu Atoll with hopes of expansion to other regions in the Maldives, serving as a baseline point of reference. This is done by utilising years of data collection on the exact times and species recorded to engage in mass coral spawning, and by using coral larvae to replenish reefs impacted by climate change and other anthropogenic impacts within Laamu.

Thanks to our comprehensive coral database, we have been able to use this data to predict mass coral spawning events, which has resulted in coral spawning monitoring dives between the months of October and February. Amazingly, we have also been able to identify time frames when spawning is most likely, which has maximised our collection efforts and emphasizes the importance of data collection.

One of the many wonders of the underwater world is how corals are able to coordinate across an entire reef and spawn together. Corals are able to do this by picking up on slight changes in the phase of the moon

with their incredible sensitivity to light. As corals tend to spawn a few days after the peak lunar phase, we check coral colonies along the house reef for eggs. We do this by conducting gravid coral surveys, also referred to as cracking surveys, where we break off small branches of coral and take pictures of the cross section using a microscopic camera. This is where we can find the tiny eggs, and if they are pink, it means the coral colony will spawn within a few days' time.

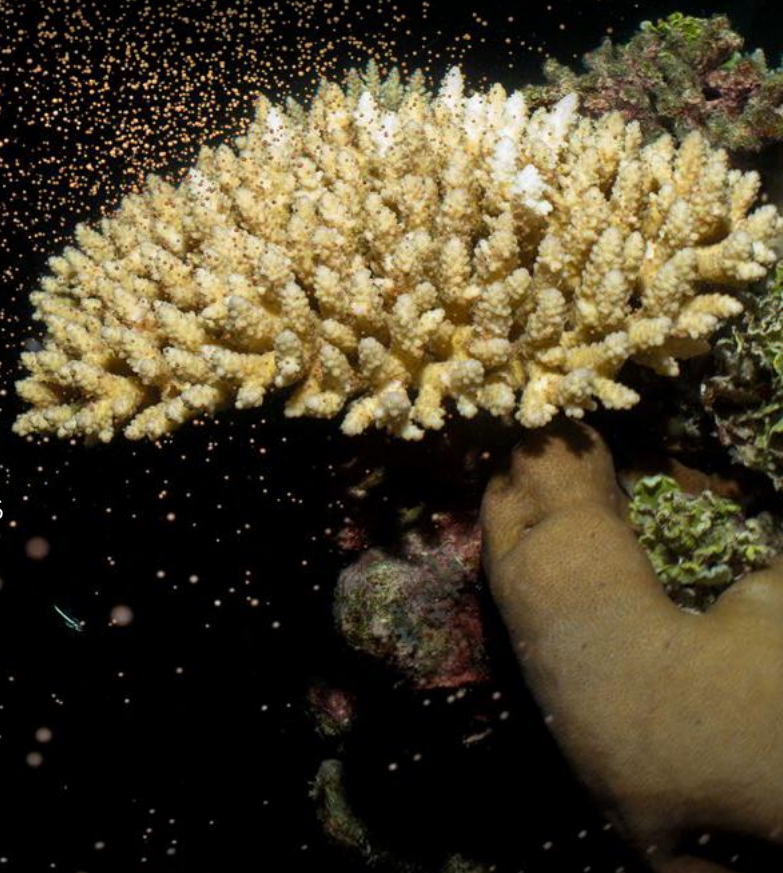
The full moon will rise, and spawning will occur anytime from two to seven days after the full moon. Corals will spawn a couple of hours after sunset, which is when our team will conduct night dives to search for the first signs of spawning. This manifests in a phenomenon known as "setting," where you can observe vivid pink eggs at the surface of the tiny coral polyps. We then deploy spawn collection devices on setting coral colonies, and wait for them to spawn. Once spawning begins, the colonies will begin releasing colourful eggs everywhere in a brilliant display of nature's resilience and tenacity. Being able to witness this rare event, which lasts only a couple of minutes, is one of the most special moments here at MUI.



**47** coral spawning surveys conducted



**16** mass coral spawning events witnessed





**3,903** minutes  
of spawning  
surveys conducted



**143** coral  
colonies witnessed  
spawning





**278,115** baby corals  
reared in coral tanks



**990,000** larvae  
released onto the reef

## LARVAL

# RESTORATION

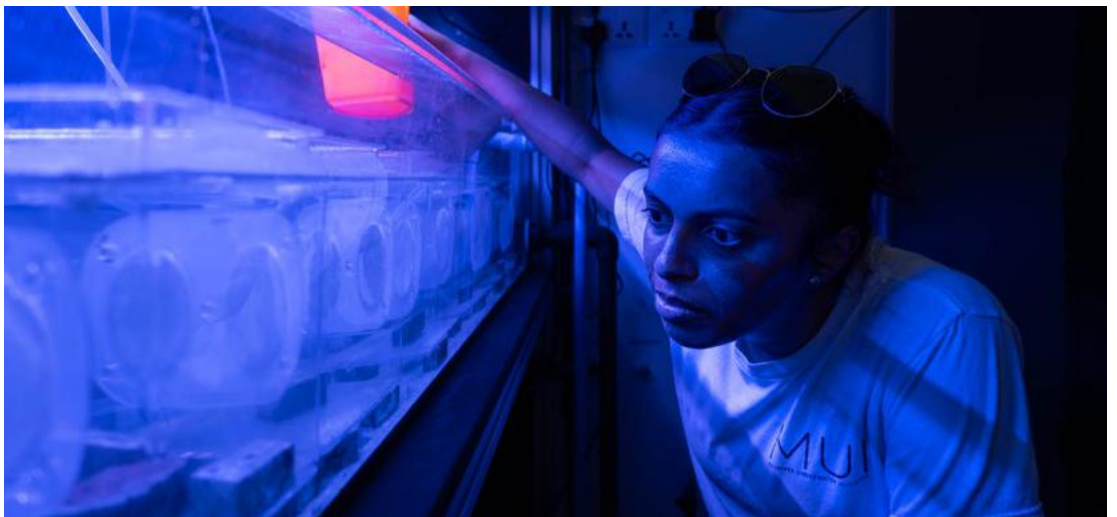
Larval restoration is a coral restoration method where we collect coral eggs from coral spawning, artificially fertilise and cultivate them into coral larva before they are released back onto the reef. In the wild, there is an estimated successful fertilisation rate of 10%, but this method increases the success rate up to 90%. This method also increases genetic diversity and forms stronger corals, as they have inherited their parents genes, which have survived devastating bleaching events.

Our team of snorkellers and divers work together to bring back the deployed spawning cones back to land where they are collected in giant tubs. Coral eggs must have flowing water so we ensure that the water is not still for too long. The two hours that follow collection are the most crucial for a high fertilisation rate so the team is constantly monitoring the eggs and conditions.


Fertilisation appears in the form of “coral butts,” a scientific term given to these coral bundles that look like they are splitting into two. Once we see multiple coral butts, the saltwater in the tubs is carefully replaced with fresh saltwater to prevent polyspermy, which results in healthy eggs becoming unviable. Once these steps are done, samples are taken and the process is resumed the following morning. In the past,

we have used a large pontoon to develop and release the eggs but in 2025, we revised this process to be more streamlined and require less physical manpower. With the help of Aquarium Connections, we were able to adapt the Coral Cove, our ex-situ coral tank system, to be suitable to grow the collected baby corals. This change was met with varied success, as one month resulted in a higher mortality rate, which was possibly due to the increase in the water flow, but the following month had a higher success rate in the earlier stages. Despite these obstacles, we were able to release around one million larvae back onto our house reef and we will continue to finetune this process with each spawning event.

A fraction of these coral larvae have been kept inside our coral tanks where they settled down to ceramic tiles that were prepared beforehand. Their growth will be monitored in the long term while they expand from a microscopically small polyp into a healthy colony. Our previous corals from past larval restoration have been thriving in our Coral Cove and show beautiful branching growth. We hope that these coral babies will give us new insight and discoveries in the years to come.





An underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the foreground, there are large, branching coral structures with a yellowish-tan hue. A school of small, silvery fish is swimming near the coral. In the middle ground, a larger, dark fish is swimming. On the left side, a diver's head and snorkel are visible. The background is a deep blue, slightly hazy water surface.

“EVERY INDIVIDUAL MATTERS. EVERY  
INDIVIDUAL HAS A ROLE TO PLAY. EVERY  
INDIVIDUAL MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”

JANE GOODALL



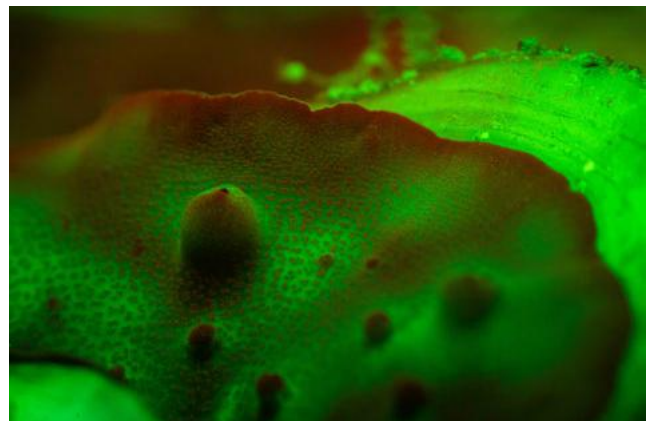
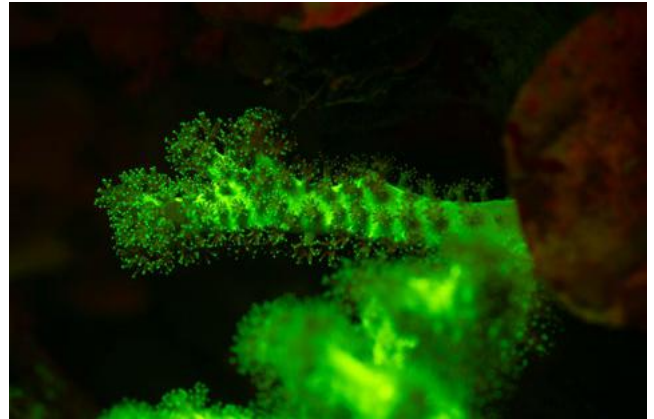
# OUR CORAL ID DATABASE

To highlight the incredible biodiversity of Laamu's reefs and create a valuable tool for coral researchers and conservation practitioners, MUI is developing a coral species database tailored specifically to Laamu atoll. Over the past few years, the database has expanded to include 105 distinct coral species along with detailed description. Identifying corals has always been challenging, as many existing references are outdated and coral appearances vary significantly between regions. Consequently, earlier identification efforts were largely limited to the genus level.

Over the course of time, MUI will continue to update the database as new species are discovered and plans are underway to make 3D models of corals by photogrammetry with a 3D coral database publicly available on our website. This resource will support improved monitoring of the reefs and restoration projects. It will also make it easier for future research, reef restoration projects and educational initiatives, both, nationally and beyond.

A well curated database helps researchers and students seamlessly identify coral species, and reduce misidentification by improving data quality. We can also monitor reef health by tracking changes in corals during bleaching events and the recovery in the years to follow, which can also identify vulnerable reef areas. The coral ID database is a valuable tool to protect our beautiful coral reefs for future generations.

Matt Drysdale, a recognized coral biologist, visited Six Senses Laamu in late 2024 to work with the amazing MUI team. He mentioned that much has changed since his first visit in 2021 and it was incredible for him to see how much has grown and thrived since then. In just twelve days, he identified and documented 87 coral species around Laamu by visiting a diverse range of reef habitats from seagrass meadows to sheltered inner reefs. During the visit, he also delivered a guest presentation on his research and assisted the MUI team with coral spawning night dives. MUI is grateful for his guidance and we look forward to continuing to grow the database in 2026 to be able to benefit, both, our research and the greater good.



# MANTA RAY RESEARCH



**531** in water  
surveys conducted by  
the Manta Trust team



**579** confirmed manta  
sightings through photo  
identification



**67** individual manta  
rays identified





# MANTA TRUST'S PURPOSE

Laamu Atoll is home to a small but resident population of reef manta rays, with 157 individuals identified to date. While the Maldives supports more than 6,000 manta rays, the largest known population in the world, Laamu's manta community is distinctive for a different reason. Many individuals remain resident within the atoll year-round, resulting in reliable sightings throughout the year and providing a rare opportunity to monitor the same mantas over long periods of time.

This consistency forms the backbone of our research. A resident population allows for high-quality, long-term studies that observe natural behaviour with minimal external disturbance, while enabling individual mantas to be tracked throughout their lives. This level of continuity supports research into growth rates, site fidelity, reproductive cycles, healing from injuries, movement patterns, and overall health. Together, these insights are invaluable not only for Laamu Atoll, but also for informing manta conservation efforts at a national scale.

Manta rays are more than charismatic icons of the ocean. Ecologically, they play an important role in regulating plankton communities and act as indicator species, with their presence and behaviour reflecting broader environmental changes across reef ecosystems. They also hold significant value for ecotourism, attracting guests who often arrive drawn by the mantas and leave with a deeper understanding of and connection to Laamu's wider marine environment. This "cuddly conservation"

effect helps foster long-term awareness and ocean stewardship.

The stability and accessibility of Laamu's manta population continue to make the atoll a key site for scientific research in the Maldives. Recent national-level studies, including a recently published ultrasound research paper, relied heavily on Laamu's consistent manta presence and uninterrupted behavioural patterns. These conditions are rarely found elsewhere and highlight the broader significance of maintaining long-term monitoring at this site.

Ongoing research is also strengthening our understanding of intra-atoll ecology. By documenting how mantas use feeding areas, channels, and cleaning stations, we are able to identify the full range of habitats they depend on. This information has direct applications for marine spatial planning, future marine protected area (MPA) design, and the development of evidence-based national policies.

Our manta research is embedded within an ecosystem-wide approach. Alongside manta monitoring, we contribute to broader megafauna surveys and assess human impacts across the atoll. As climate pressures intensify, these long-term datasets are becoming increasingly vital for understanding how manta rays, and large marine species in general, respond to a rapidly changing ocean.





# MANTA RAY RESEARCH FOCUS



**108** hours of remote  
underwater video footage



**18** ultrasound scans of  
manta rays



**22** SVP measurements  
of manta rays



**77,935** photographs  
analysed from remote  
deployments

Our 2025 research programme continued to deepen our understanding of how Laamu’s manta rays use the atoll, how they grow and reproduce, and how they interact with their environment. Thanks to the ability to reliably re-sight many of the same individuals year after year, each research method adds another layer to a long-term story that is now 11 years in the making.

A major focus this year was increasing both SCUBA survey effort and Eyes on the Reef (EOTR) camera system deployments. In total, 671 survey dives were conducted across Laamu’s main cleaning stations and channels. These dives provided high-quality photo-identification records and behavioural observations, while also allowing us to track how individual mantas use specific cleaning blocks. This fine-scale site fidelity is only possible to document because of Laamu’s stable, resident population.

In parallel, the team deployed 30 EOTR systems, resulting in 120 remote survey days and the collection of 77,935 photographs across five sites, including the newly identified Fonadhoo cleaning station. At one site alone, known as Fonadhoo Outside, 14 unique individuals were

recorded during a single deployment. These systems allow us to monitor cleaning stations more frequently and provide new insights into manta movement within the atoll.

Together, the EOTR systems and SCUBA surveys enabled comprehensive monitoring of cleaning stations across Laamu, documenting where mantas clean, when they visit, which individuals return repeatedly, and how site use changes with tides and time of day.

During peak manta season, remote underwater video (RUV) deployments were concentrated at Hithadhoo Corner, Laamu’s most prominent cleaning station. In total, 108 hours of video footage were recorded, revealing emerging patterns in manta–shark interactions, cleaning dynamics, and site-specific behaviour.

To better understand growth rates and population structure, we continued using stereo video photogrammetry (SVP) to measure mantas throughout the atoll. In 2025, 22 new measurements were obtained, including 13 juveniles and 9 mature individuals. These data strengthen our long-term demographic records and help track life stages present within the population.



The Manta Trust team also continued collecting ultrasound scan data to more accurately assess fecundity and detect pregnancies in female reef manta rays. Using non-invasive ultrasound techniques during free-swimming encounters, trained researchers conducted scans in line with strict animal welfare guidelines, with videos recorded for later analysis. A total of 18 ultrasound sessions were completed, scanning 12 confirmed female individuals, several of which were re-scanned multiple times, including one individual scanned on four separate occasions. Preliminary analysis has identified both definitively non-pregnant and pregnant individuals, including a pregnant manta that showed no visible external signs of pregnancy.

This finding highlights the critical value of ultrasound techniques for detecting early or non-obvious pregnancies

that would otherwise go unnoticed. With manta ray ultrasound scanning currently occurring at only four known locations worldwide, this work represents cutting-edge, non-invasive science and positions Laamu Atoll, and the Maldives, at the forefront of manta reproductive research, with strong potential for long-term monitoring of pregnancy cycles.

In addition, Hydromoth acoustic recorders were deployed throughout 2025, with 21 units placed across the atoll. These recordings will be used to assess how anthropogenic (human-related) disturbances, such as scuba diving and boat traffic, affect reef soundscapes and cleaning-station activity, and how these changes may in turn influence manta ray behaviour.



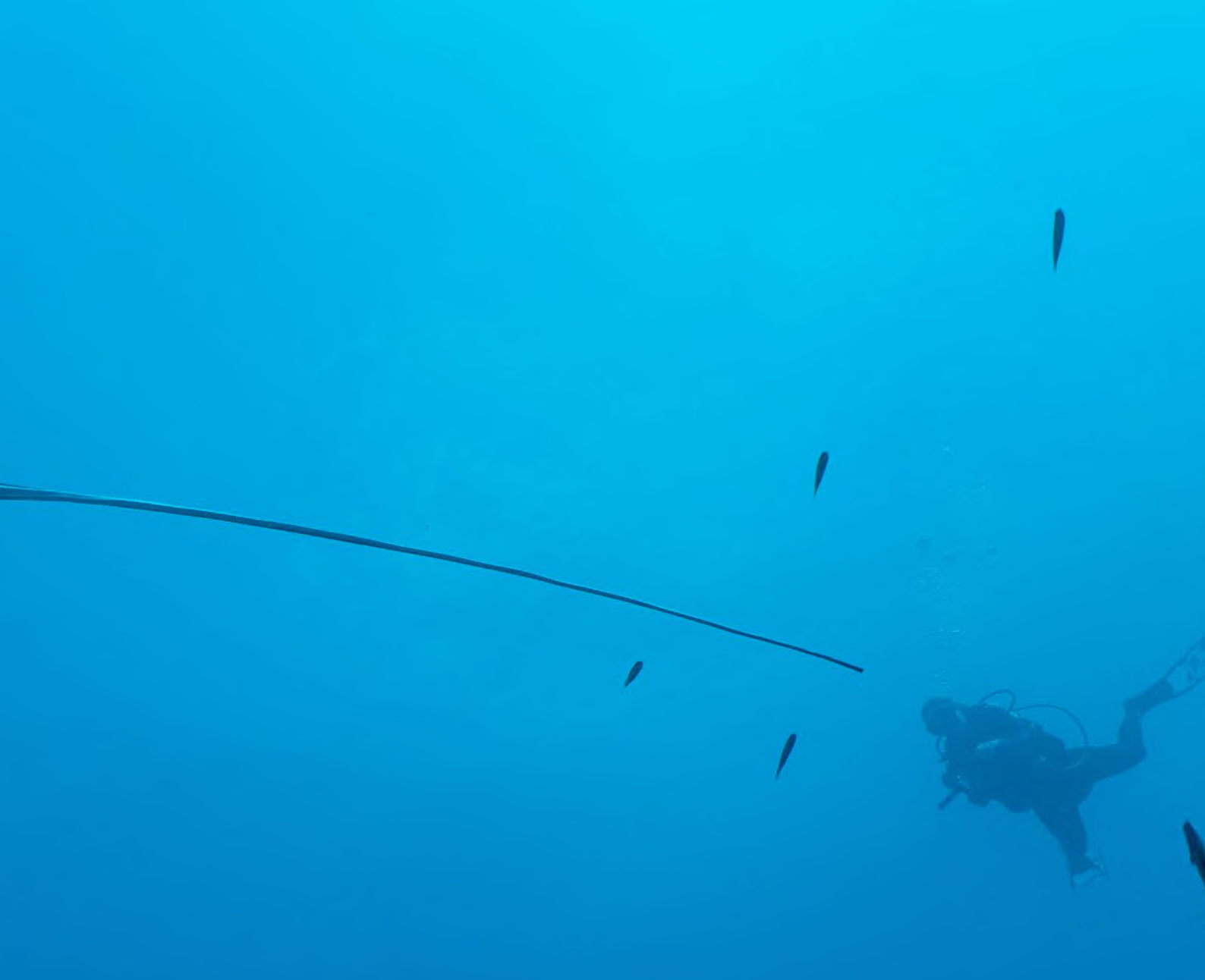
## LONG TERM TRENDS

Manta ray sightings in 2025 show a strong rebound following a comparatively lower year in 2024. A total of 579 confirmed sightings were recorded this year, representing a substantial increase from 379 sightings in 2024, and aligning more closely with higher survey years such as 2023 (630 sightings) and 2022 (657 sightings). This rebound suggests a return to more typical encounter rates within Laamu Atoll following the dip observed in previous year.

In addition to the overall increase in sightings, sightings per survey also increased markedly in 2025, indicating

a substantial improvement in encounter rates relative to survey effort. This trend suggests that manta rays were encountered more consistently during surveys compared to recent years, even when accounting for effort. The sharp rise in sightings per survey represents one of the strongest indicators of improved manta presence within Laamu Atoll during the reporting period, and reinforces the broader rebound observed in total annual sightings.

Of the 157 individual Laamu mantas, 67 individual manta rays were encountered during the year. The most sighted individual this year was MV-MA-2913, aka.



Sheen. Sheen is a well-known manta ray with a big personality to match her graceful wingspan. First sighted in 2013 at Hithadhoo Corner, she has become a familiar and much-loved individual over the years. Exceptionally playful and curious, Sheen often approaches divers with confidence, making every encounter memorable. Sighted an impressive 37 times in 2025, she's one of the Manta Trust team's favourites, always swimming in close to deliver the perfect ID shot.

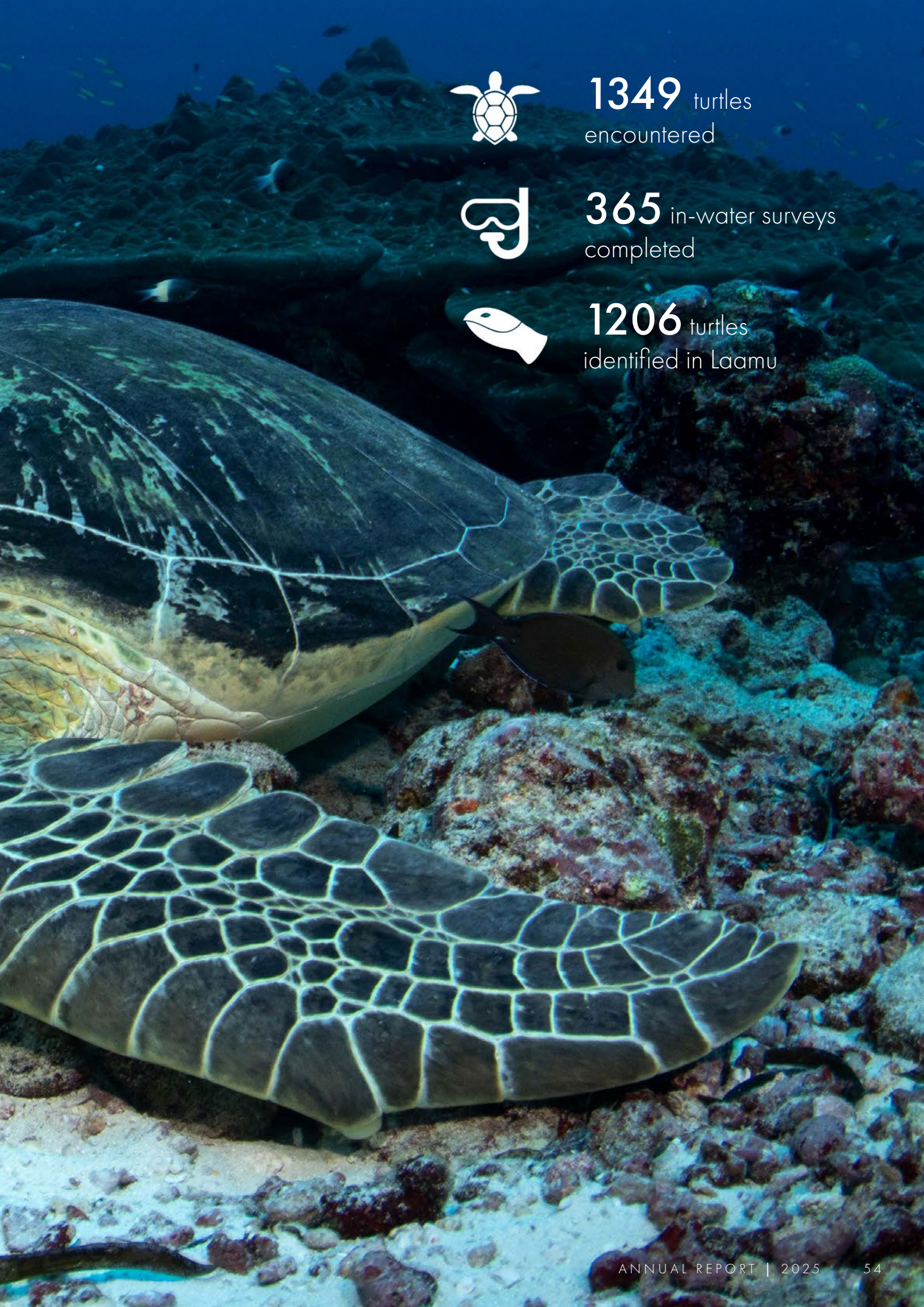
Of the individuals sighted throughout 2025, 36 were females and 28 were males, resulting in a female-to-male ratio of approximately 1.3. Age-class data indicate a relatively balanced population structure, with 31 juveniles and sub-adults and 33 adults recorded.

Sex-specific sighting frequencies further highlight the prominence of females within the aggregation. Female manta rays accounted for 357 confirmed sightings, compared to 195 sightings of males, reflecting both the skewed sex ratio and potentially differing habitat use or residency patterns between sexes.

Indicators of reproductive activity were also recorded throughout the year. Pregnancies were documented on 11 occasions across eight individual females, while 18 individual females were observed with mating scars a total of 33 times. Together, these observations provide valuable insight into ongoing reproductive activity within the population and reinforce the importance of Laamu Atoll as a biologically significant area for manta rays.

# SEA TURTLE RESEARCH

A large sea turtle, likely a hawksbill, is the central focus of the image. It is resting on a sandy beach with scattered coral rubble and small fish. The turtle's head is turned towards the left, and its shell shows a distinct pattern of dark and light scutes. The background is a vibrant underwater scene with various coral structures and several small fish swimming around. The overall lighting is bright and clear, highlighting the textures of the turtle's skin and the surrounding environment.



**1349** turtles  
encountered



**365** in-water surveys  
completed



**1206** turtles  
identified in Laamu

# TURTLE ID DATABASE

Since the beginning of the partnership with Six Senses Laamu, the Olive Ridley Project (ORP) has been using Photo-ID as a method to identify sea turtles around Laamu Atoll.

This non-invasive technique involves capturing photographs of the left and right sides of turtles' heads, using the unique pattern of facial scutes to differentiate between individuals. The Photo-IDs images were gathered by the ORP Sea Turtle Biologist and intern on regular scuba dive and snorkel surveys, as well as by citizen scientists and resort guests.

This research provides data about the abundance, distribution and behaviour of different sea turtle species within the atoll. This in turn helps to better inform future

conservation management plans. 54 new turtles were identified and added to the Maldives national ID database, of these 24 were hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and 30 were green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*).

Some sites in particular, which were more remote, such as Fonagaadhoo in the far north of the atoll, provided many new turtles to the ORP team this year. These new additions bring the total number of Laamu sea turtles with a national ID to 1206!

**This ID database is now the third largest in the Maldives.**



**30** new green turtles identified



**24** new hawksbill turtles identified





# NESTING TURTLES

2025 has been a busy year for nesting green turtles on Olhuveli with 26 nests laid, and approximately 1748 hatchlings making it to the ocean. This total tops that of 2024 by five additional nests. From the nests laid the mean clutch size (number of eggs) was 108 eggs, with the total number of eggs for the year being 2808. Of all eggs laid there was a hatching success rate of 63.3%. This is lower than the 81% hatching success reported in 2024. Factors influencing this may be: increased fungus in nests, crab predation and flooding.

Similarly to previous years, nesting females have shown a preference for a particular stretch of beach for nesting. This area lies along the south western side of the island, spanning from Leaf restaurant to villa 87. This year 85.2% of all true nests were laid here, as well as 82.5% of all turtle activity including false crawls and abandoned nesting attempts. Last year, 95.2% of the nests were laid in this area. This stretch of beach may appeal to nesting females due to its higher profile which offers some protection from inundation, and the thick vegetation line which offers cover and cooler sand. However, despite the higher profile, two nests in this zone as well as one nest on the other side of the island faced flooding as they were laid close to the high tide line. The two nests within the zone were successfully relocated in accordance with ORP guidelines and the third nest flooded.

A negative correlation has been observed in the last few years in clutch incubation periods on Olhuveli. For green sea turtles the hatching window usually falls in between 50-70 days of incubation, with the average incubation time in the Maldives being around 49-62 days. In colder regions around the world this can be longer, even taking up to 80 days.

On Olhuveli the average number of days for incubation was 52.7. In 2024 it was 56.8. This decrease in incubation time over the past few years may be due to higher environmental temperatures, as there is a proven link between higher sand temperatures and shorter incubation periods. For the next nesting season on Olhuveli, sea turtle biologist Juliette will be deploying temperature loggers with new nests to track incubation temperature and humidity to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction between temperature and incubation time.



**1748** hatchlings  
made it to the ocean



**26** nests laid at  
Six Senses Laamu



**63%** hatching  
success in 2025



# SEA TURTLE RANGER PROGRAM

In 2006 Gaadhoo was listed by the Ministry of Fisheries as one of 14 highly important nesting sites for green turtles in the Maldives. This is due to the high number of nests laid on the island. Historically, an estimated 240 nests were laid per year in the 1980s by Frazier et al. (1984). However, island residents have claimed that the number was far higher with around 1400 nests per year.

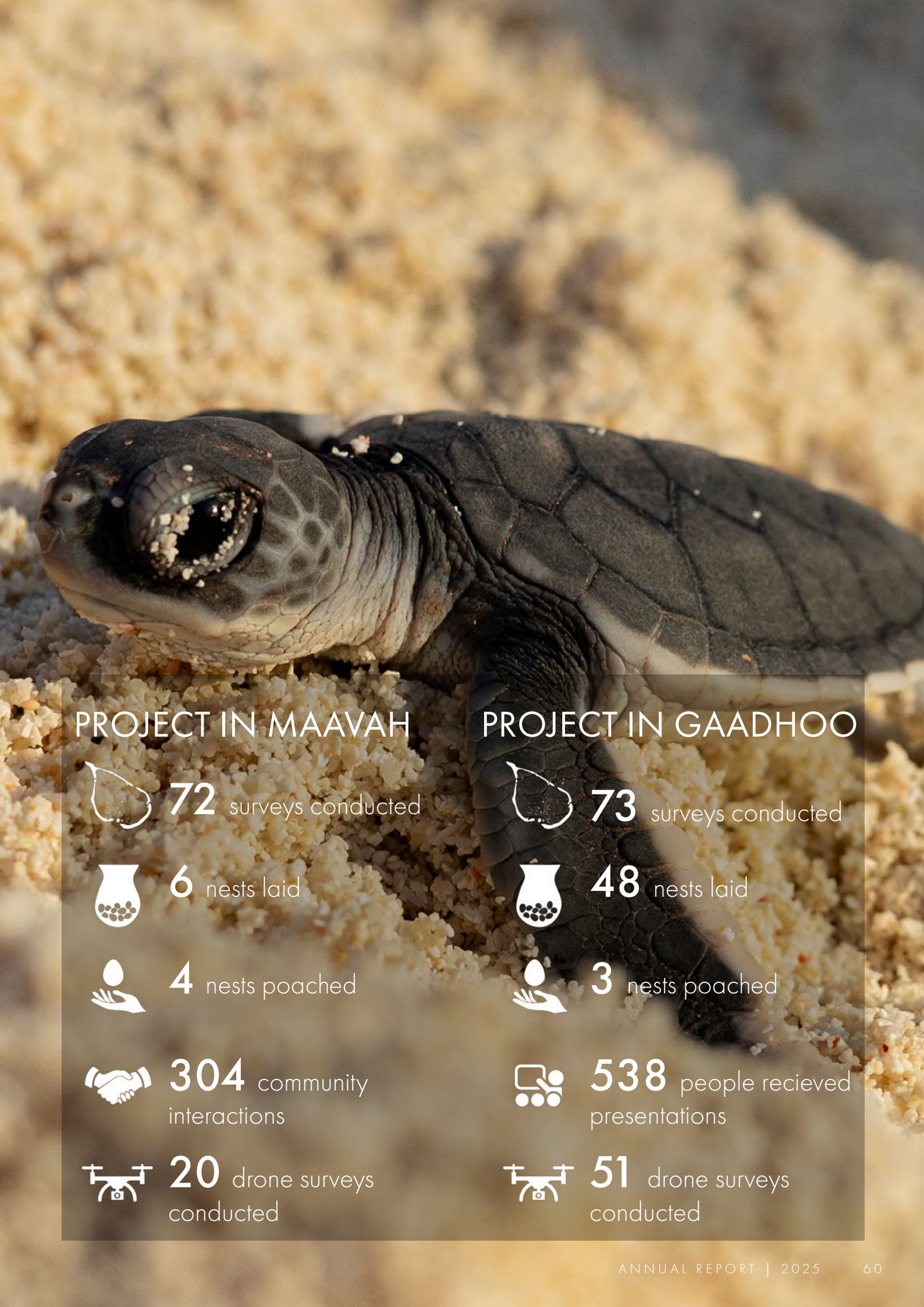
In recent years, this number is lower, with an estimated decline of 40% (Ali and Shimal, 2016) in nesting on Gaadhoo by 2016. In 2024 there were only 50 recorded nests and 48 in 2025. This decrease is likely due to sustained, unmanaged illegal take as well as encroaching vegetation on the main nesting beach Velaa Heylhi which has reduced the available nesting area for turtles. This 500m stretch of beach was once maintained by Gaadhoo's residents, who controlled the beach vegetation to expand the nesting capacity of the area. This community was unique in the Maldives for actively managing the take of green turtle eggs in a sustainable manner up until the harvest of turtle eggs was banned in 2006. Since that time, nests have continued to be covertly harvested but no longer with any systematic management.

In an attempt to mitigate the impacts of illegal take on Gaadhoo's nests, ORP and the Environmental Regulatory Authority began the Laamu Sea Turtle Beach Guardian Program, in collaboration with Laamu Atoll Council and Fonadhoo Island Council. Prior to the programme, ORP recorded that an average of 59.5% of all suspected nests showed signs of illegal take. Since 2023, the presence and hard work of the Sea Turtle Rangers has resulted in lower rates of illegal take. This is due to monitoring presence on the nesting beach, engagement with key stakeholders in Fonadhoo and Gan and outreach activities to educate about sea turtles and increase awareness. Last year, Sea Turtle Ranger Program Coordinator Ibrahim Inaan reported a 12% illegal take rate. This decreased even further in 2025 to an estimated 6% of suspected nests.

After one year, this program expanded to include the island of L. Maavah in collaboration with Maavah Council. Maavah is known for a high incidence of illegal take of turtle meat and eggs. Education therefore became a cornerstone of ORP's work in Maavah. In May, ORP delivered a teacher training workshop for educators from Maavah School, introducing the Sea Turtle Handbook and exploring ways to integrate turtle conservation into preschool, primary, and secondary curricula. Despite challenging weather conditions limiting attendance, the session generated strong engagement and laid the groundwork for future collaboration between ORP and the school community.

That same week, ORP partnered with the Maavah Island Council to celebrate Children's Day through an interactive outreach event. More than 70 children and parents took part in turtle-themed games and activities, learning how turtles are identified and why conservation efforts matter. Led by ORP's Sea Turtle Conservation Officer, the event blended fun with learning, strengthening local awareness and enthusiasm for protecting marine life.

As the year progressed, ORP's Laamu Sea Turtle Beach Guardian Program gained national recognition. At both the Theveli Conference 2025 and the 3rd Atoll Marine Symposium, ORP shared the success of its community-based ranger model—highlighting how empowering local youth and working closely with island councils in places like Maavah and Gadhoos has improved turtle monitoring, reduced threats, and fostered a strong sense of local ownership. These presentations demonstrated how Laamu's approach can inspire similar initiatives across other atolls in the Maldives. As a result of the diligent monitoring of the Gaadhoo nesting beach, community outreach and education events, illegal take remains low compared to pre-program levels - indicating how successful the program has been.



## PROJECT IN MAAVAH



**72** surveys conducted



**6** nests laid



**4** nests poached



**304** community interactions



**20** drone surveys conducted

## PROJECT IN GAADHOO



**73** surveys conducted



**48** nests laid



**3** nests poached



**538** people recieved presentations



**51** drone surveys conducted

An underwater photograph showing a diver in the lower right corner, looking towards the camera. A long, tangled piece of brown fishing gear, known as a ghost net, stretches diagonally from the top left towards the center. The water is clear blue, and some coral is visible at the bottom.

# SEA TURTLE RESCUE

From around November to April, the Maldives experiences its north east monsoon season. Known in Dhivehi as Iruvai, this period encompasses nine of the 27 microseasons in the Maldivian Nakaiy calendar. During this time, surface geostrophic currents generally flow westward.

However, as well as bringing in megafauna such as manta rays, due to nutrient rich water entering the atolls, this time of year also sees abandoned fishing gear known as 'ghost nets' entering Maldivian waters from the East. These ghost nets are a threat to turtles as they are often colonised by algae, crustaceans and small fish which entice hungry turtles to get very close. They also offer turtles an opportunity to bask and warm themselves in the sun if they climb onto the nets. This can result in entanglement and in many cases, limb loss and death from starvation and exhaustion. The ORP team are vigilant during this time of year, for any ghost net sightings in the atoll.

However, turtle entanglements can also occur outside of the Iruvai. This year, on the 30th August (during the Hulhangu monsoon), the Sea Turtle Biologist Juliette received a call about an injured olive ridley turtle

(*Lepidochelys olivacea*) on the neighbouring island of Laamu Gan. Fishermen had encountered the turtle stuck in a ghost net near the shore and after discovering that she could not successfully dive by herself, they contacted the Sea Turtle Ranger Programme Coordinator Ibrahim Inaan. Inaan enlisted the help of the ORP Laamu intern at the time, Mohamed Sharoof who transported the turtle to Six Senses Laamu by speedboat. This turtle was completely missing her front right flipper and had deep ligation wounds to one of her rear flippers caused by monofilament fishing line. She was kept comfortable overnight at the resort whilst Juliette, resort transport managers and the ORP Male team organised her transport to the ORP Marine Turtle Rescue Centre (MTRC) in Baa Atoll.

Since her arrival to the MTRC, this turtle has made a remarkable recovery. She was given medication for an internal infection and the vet team were able to save her hind flipper which she still has full use of. Furthermore, she gained back the ability to dive down to the bottom of her tank due to targeted physical therapy using food. This turtle - named Riveli by those who first encountered her in L. Gan - has now successfully been released back into the wild.



**50kg** of ghost  
nets retrieved



**1** turtle sent to  
rescue center



# FISHERIES RESEARCH



**\$33,000+** into local economy through sustainable fishing



**8** new fishers registered



**49** fishers registered in the program



# FISH FOR TOMORROW PROGRAM

The 'Fish for Tomorrow' program was initially piloted at Six Senses Laamu in 2020, with the aim to improve the sustainability and transparency of reef fisheries by encouraging resorts to source responsibly caught fish and engage local fishers, while minimising harm to the environment. The program has been such a success that it has now begun to expand to more resorts throughout Maldives, adapting to the operational needs and community context of the atoll.

In 2025, the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa sustainable reef fisheries programme was rebranded to "Fish for Tomorrow" to support its nationwide roll out. It is hoped that the new name will make the programme more accessible to resort adoption across Maldives. At Six Senses Laamu, the FFT program has continued to run successfully throughout the year. Seven new fishers have registered on the program, seafood landings totalling over 13,000kg have contributed over \$33,000 USD to the local economy,



**21** local fishers  
sold to resort



**2** new resorts signed up to  
the program

and 21 local fishers have sold seafood to the resort.

This year MRR also aimed to update the sustainable fishing programme via technology called Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS). This device makes it possible to track fishing activity in real time and improve how the program is managed and reported. Working closely with the local fishing community, consultation meetings were held to discuss any concerns they may have about the devices and select the fishers we felt were best to work

with for the pilot phase. This device not only allows us to improve the quality of our fisheries data, but it also provides the fishers with a safety at sea device. With just one press of the SOS button a message is sent directly to the fisher's emergency contact and coast guard. The pilot stage will give us insight into how well the devices are used, determining if they are a valuable asset to gather information as the program progresses.

# RECREATIONAL FISHING



**156** recreational fishing trips  
with data collected



**1,995** guests engaged as  
fisheries citizen scientists



Data collected by Blue Marine and Maldives Resilient Reefs from the recreational side of our sustainable fishing programme was used by MSc student, Matthew Donaldson, from the University of Edinburgh to write his dissertation.

The data set was collected at Six Senses Laamu, consisting of 427 trips over a period of 3 years, where the guests, fishing guides and boat crews recorded detailed information about each fishing trip, including species caught, sizes, and fishing effort. Unlike many other citizen science projects that struggle with inconsistent data and limited access to participants, this program benefits from a stable, resort-based setting.

Data collection on recreational fishing trips is recorded by guests with the assistance of trained boat crews, helping avoid common problems like incorrect fish identification or inaccurate measurements. Matthew's research showed that the data can offer insights into overall catch trends and even species-specific patterns. These findings could help guide better fishing practices - not only at this resort but across the Maldives. This case highlights the value of citizen science: when properly designed, it can generate reliable, large-scale data that complements traditional scientific methods.

# GROUPEL SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS

Groupers are large predatory fish that are essential in maintaining a balanced reef as they eat smaller fish and crustaceans. Unfortunately, they grow very slowly, take many years to reach sexual maturity, and are susceptible to overfishing.

Globally, grouper populations have been declining and some species are considered "Vulnerable" or "Threatened," as a direct result of overfishing. Within the Maldives, evidence suggests that only 10-30% of groupers caught are sexually mature, meaning that only a fraction of those groupers were able to reproduce before being removed from the ecosystem. This has been detrimental to grouper populations across the Maldives as overfishing has changed the status of several grouper species on the IUCN red list.

Following a request from the Maldivian government to improve grouper fishery management, in 2016, Blue Marine Foundation began surveying grouper spawning aggregations at a local dive site within Laamu Atoll. Throughout certain months of the year during the new moon phase, groupers gather in large numbers to breed. These aggregations increase mating opportunities by bringing sexes together and reducing the search cost for mates, while also serving as ecological hot spots by

providing sustenance for scavengers and predators like sharks. Unfortunately, due to the predictability of these events, they are extremely vulnerable to fishers looking to maximize their catch while minimizing effort.

Like the surveys of years past, in 2025, the team conducted dives over three months during the peak season to document the pre-spawning behaviors of groupers such as color changing, chasing, biting and rubbing against each other. These behaviors are seen in anticipation of the cataclysmic night around the new moon - when all conditions are perfect females release their eggs and in response, males release sperm. This coordinated release assures future generations of groupers.

Due to tremendous survey effort over the years, Blue Marine and Maldives Resilient Reefs have now collected enough baseline data, meaning a survey break can be taken in 2026. The data from future surveys will identify if there is a shift in trends and continue to influence management strategies and serve as a foundation for scientific publication. This data is vital in protecting grouper spawning aggregations, maintaining ecological balances, and ensuring the livelihoods of local fishers who depend on healthy grouper stocks.



**19** grouper spawning aggregation surveys

**113** highest number of groupers recorded during one survey



**13** BRUV  
deployments



**5** different shark  
species seen



# SHARK POPULATION RESEARCH A SHARK TALE

Approximately, 30 species of sharks inhabit the waters of the Maldives, but the introduction of longline fishing in the 1960s led to unsustainable shark harvesting. This caused a dramatic decline in shark populations and the collapse of traditional shark fisheries. In response, the Maldives protected whale sharks in 1995 and implemented a complete ban on shark fishing and trade within the Maldives Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 2010 and 2011.

These efforts have allowed the development of shark-based ecotourism as an important socio-economic alternative. However, increasing anthropogenic pressures such as climate change, habitat destruction, and overfishing, pose new threats. Additionally, pressure

to lift the shark fishing ban in the Maldives has increased, leading to the re-opening of the Gulper Shark Fishery in November 2025. Given the increasing pressures and uncertain political climate, urgent habitat protection for sharks in the Maldives is essential.

MRR's new research project aims to provide baseline data about shark populations for the Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) in Laamu Atoll. This information will also be useful for identifying potential Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs), and shark nursery and aggregation hotspots in the atoll. This data will be collected by deploying Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVS) to monitor shark population data, a non-invasive method of data collection, minimising risk of stress and



injury to marine wildlife. BRUVS can also be deployed from the water's surface, negating the need for divers in the water, minimising risk to researchers in remote environments. A mix of benthic and pelagic BRUVs will be deployed throughout the Gaadhoo-Hithadhoo Kanduu area in Laamu atoll. The footage will be analysed to identify species and number of sharks present in this area of Laamu. If this pilot study is successful, we hope to expand the research to further areas of the atoll to collect this vital data.



# OUR

# EDUCATION





# THREE YEARS OF THE SHELL

The SHELL (Sea Hub of Environmental Learning in Laamu) is a marine education and research centre and our MUI home. It is one of the most expansive and advanced facilities of its kind within the Maldives resort landscape, serving as a pioneering model of marine conservation embedded within luxury hospitality. Launched in March 2023 at Six Senses Laamu, the SHELL combines interactive educational experiences, cutting-edge research facilities, and immersive exhibitions to engage guests, hosts, and local communities in understanding, valuing, and protecting the region's underwater ecosystems.



**4,456** educational  
guest interactions in the SHELL



**287** hosts visited  
the SHELL

## What guests have to say about our marine education center - the Sea Hub of Environmental Learning in Laamu (SHELL):

"What makes the SHELL so special is the way it takes complex marine research and brings it to life so that anyone, of any age, can connect with it. You don't find that anywhere else in the Maldives. For me, it's the missing piece in luxury travel, adding meaning and authenticity to a holiday, while leaving guests with a genuine connection to the ocean and its protection."

"I was deeply impressed by how carefully the team protects the marine environment while offering meaningful activities that connect guests with conservation. "Shell" is a must-visit, showing how luxury and sustainability can go hand in hand."

"The SHELL is a must visit"

"The SHELL & coral rejuvenation was inspiring, a beautiful reminder of the resort's love for nature & sustainability the resort is so great at."



**611** children learned in the SHELL



**145** community members visited the SHELL

# OUR GUESTS



**3,340** guests joined MUI for educational snorkels



**1,379** guests listened to MUI's presentations



**14,545** moments of education with guests



**2,112** guests joined MUI on dolphin cruises

Education lies at the heart of everything we do. We believe that meaningful connection leads to lasting protection, and through knowledge, we empower people to better understand and appreciate the ocean.

Each of our activities is thoughtfully designed to inspire curiosity, foster awareness, and create a deeper sense of responsibility for the marine world. By sharing our passion and expertise, we aim to nurture a new generation of ocean advocates, ensuring that every experience

becomes a step toward greater conservation.

We are increasingly receiving feedback from guests who say they choose to come to Six Senses Laamu because of our marine education and conservation work. These are people from all over the world who, once inspired, can echo our teachings and create positive change for the ocean. By going through the SHELL, their holidays transform into a regenerative experience.



OUR

# GUEST ACTIVITIES

## GUIDED SHELL TOUR

Guided by our marine biologists, this immersive journey invites guests to discover the remarkable SHELL facilities. From the Laboratory, where cutting-edge research brings marine science to life, to the Glass Bottom Boat, offering a window into the ocean without even getting your feet wet, each space is designed to inspire curiosity and connection. In the Interactive Room, engaging games encourage a deeper understanding of marine ecosystems and conservation efforts, while the Exhibition Room showcases striking marine animal sculptures alongside thoughtfully designed educational displays.



## GUIDED HOUSEREEF OR SEAGRASS SNORKEL

Our complimentary snorkelling experiences, guided by our marine biologists, offer an enriching introduction to the vibrant reefs surrounding the resort. More than a tour, they are immersive educational journeys, inviting guests to discover the intricate relationships that sustain marine life and the vital importance of protecting it. As they explore beneath the surface, guests encounter a thriving ecosystem teeming with extraordinary biodiversity, transforming each snorkel into a moment of wonder, learning, and lasting connection to the ocean.

## PRIVATE SNORKEL WITH MARINE BIOLOGIST

Our Private Snorkel with a Marine Biologist offers a more intimate and personalized way to explore the underwater world. Tailored to individual interests, this experience is ideal for guests seeking deeper knowledge, more confidence in the water, or the opportunity to discover remote and stunning reefs across the atoll by boat.





## MUI PRESENTATION

These presentations weave together basic biological information with local context and ideas about how you can help conserve the marine environment when you return home. Held in Six Senses Laamu's ice cream parlour, our marine biologists deliver a fun interactive presentation that the whole family can enjoy before dinner.

## MICROFRAGMENTATION WORKSHOP

An opportunity for guests to get hands on and involved in our coral restoration efforts. The micro-fragmentation restoration technique involves cutting selected corals into small pieces. In response to this stress, they will grow even faster in our tanks, until they are ready to be planted back to the reef, becoming new colonies and helping to repopulate damaged areas on our reefs.



## DOLPHIN CRUISE

Guided by our commitment to providing educational value in every experience, one of our marine biologists is always on board our Dolphin Cruise. Their presence enriches the journey with valuable insights into these fascinating animals, including the characteristics of the most commonly sighted species and their behaviors, while also ensuring full adherence to the code of conduct to avoid disturbing them.

## KIDS CLUB

Grow With Six Senses, one of the brand's core pillars, is dedicated to creating meaningful and enriching experiences for children's development. Contributing to this vision, MUI offers a range of engaging Kids Club activities focused on general marine life, turtles and manta rays, combining education with fun to inspire the next generation of ocean stewards.





# JUNIOR MARINE BIOLOGY

 **219** attendants to JMB

 **97** JMB sessions

Active since 2019, our Junior Marine Biologist (JMB) Program has become a signature experience at Six Senses Laamu. Many families return to the resort so their children can continue learning. In 2025, the program's success is evident: 219 participants, with 75 individual children joining sessions.

Knowing that children come to learn with us and, even years later, still carry that passion for the ocean - returning after one, two, or even three years - is a testament to the lasting impact of the JMB program. Watching them grow into even more accomplished young marine biologists is truly inspiring!

Indeed, it is a unique experience where children can step into the shoes of a marine biologist for a day, or several. Through playful, hands-on activities, they learn about the most important topics in marine life and have the opportunity to engage in real science and conservation. Each session consists of a theoretical component and a practical one, which may include a snorkel survey or a laboratory activity. Beyond learning, participants contribute to the scientific research conducted by our team.

Participants learn underwater research techniques, such as identifying different species of fish, turtles, sharks, rays, corals, and invertebrates, collecting data, and inputting that data into scientific databases. They also explore the

importance of Laamu's diverse habitats for ocean health, all while having unforgettable encounters with some of the most fascinating marine creatures.

To top it all off, children who attend three or more sessions are honored in a graduation ceremony, where they receive the title of Junior Marine Biologist, become honorary members of the MUI Team, and have a fish with their name placed on our very own "Wall of Fame." When children place their fish on the wall, their pride, joy, and sense of accomplishment are clear for all to see.

We are thrilled that 45 children graduated in 2025 and are now officially MUI Junior Marine Biologists. They have become part of our extended family. Saying goodbye was harder than ever - some couldn't hide their tears - but each farewell was followed by bright smiles and the hope of returning next year.

It's a transformative experience, one that might inspire future marine biologists and, for all others, ensures they carry the spirit of ocean guardianship wherever they go.

## MOST POPULAR JMB SPECIALITIES IN 2025:

- Sharks
- Turtle ID
- Amazing Rays



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## GUEST DIVES WITH THE MANTA TRUST

The Manta Trust team joins all guest dives to manta cleaning stations to deliver concise Code of Conduct briefings and share information about the work of the Manta Trust, MUI, and the SHELL. Our team has developed an exceptional ability to identify mantas by sight during dives, allowing us to tell guests which individuals they encountered—often before leaving the cleaning station. Back on the boat, we share stories about each manta’s history, behaviour, and previous sightings, creating a meaningful and personalised guest experience.

Following every encounter, we send a personalised Manta Memo email, which includes identification results, individual profiles for the mantas seen, and photographs captured during the dive. This follow-up has become a highlight for many guests, extending their experience beyond the water and often sparking continued interest in manta conservation.



**198** guest dives  
joined



**580** guests  
briefed on manta  
code of conduct

# HATCHING EXPERIENCES

Witnessing a sea turtle nest hatching is often one of the special highlights of a guest's visit to Six Senses Laamu. This is evidenced in the frequent TripAdvisor reviews written by departed guests who have visited the resort during hatching season. Since the start of 2025, over 100 reviews mention turtles and 16 specifically mention positive turtle hatching experiences during the hatching season (January-November in 2025).

The opportunity for guests to witness turtle hatchings is something that the ORP team endeavours to facilitate by monitoring nests in their hatching windows. This year, hosts carried out 472 hours of nestwatch, which equates to nearly 20 days of observation, in order to witness the hatching event. Most of the monitoring is carried out by the Sea Turtle Biologist and intern as well as the MUI team. However, there are also hosts from other departments who volunteer their time for nestwatch and attend hatching and excavation events.

Since the beginning of the year there have been eleven guest hatching experiences with 332 guests and 17 guest excavation events with a total of 329 guest observers. As turtle hatchlings can emerge at any time during the night; often during inclement weather, not all emergences were observed.

As well as being a special experience for guests, hatchings and excavations are an excellent opportunity for the ORP team to educate about turtle biology and conservation. The hope is that guests who become better informed about safe turtle hatches with minimal human interference will consciously avoid unethical turtle activities on their future travels elsewhere.



**661** guests witnessed nest hatchings or excavations



**11** hatching events witnessed by guests

# INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION DAYS

## WORLD MANTA DAY



To mark World Manta Day, the Manta Trust team at Six Senses Laamu dedicated four days of events under the theme "The Power of Protection," bringing guests, resort staff, and the wider community together through conservation talks, research dives, a PADI specialty course, and an immersive evening of manta-themed activities.

On World Manta Day itself, the team encountered two reef manta rays — including George Michael, whose ghost-net-damaged fin served as a vivid reminder of why protection matters — and reached 40 schoolchildren in Maamendhoo through talks, VR experiences, and face painting. From manta-shaped pancakes to community outreach, the celebrations captured the collaborative spirit of conservation.

## WORLD TOURISM DAY



In L. Hithadhoo, World Tourism Day became a living celebration of Maldivian culture, as families, elders, and students shared traditional crafts, from coir rope-making and coconut husking to thatching and stone-ground millet, alongside the games, tools, and learning practices that have shaped island life for generations.

The gathering was a reminder that the Maldives is far more than its landscapes; it is the craft, resourcefulness, and community knowledge that Maldivians have carried forward through centuries. Thank you to the L. Hithadhoo community, elders, council members, and students who brought these living traditions to life.



## WORLD SOIL DAY

Twenty students from Maamendhoo's Nature Club visited Six Senses Laamu for World Soil Day, where Sustainable Land Use Manager Adam led them through an engaging session on soil health, composting, and the unique challenges of nutrient-poor, sandy Maldivian soil.

The students got hands-on experience planting pineapple tops and lemongrass using enriched compost, bringing the theory to life in a way that felt directly relevant to their island home. The day left them with a deeper appreciation for the soil beneath their feet – and the simple actions, like composting, that can help protect it.



## WORLD DISABILITY DAY

The MUI team was honoured to attend Maamendhoo School's World Disability Day art exhibition, where students from the Special Education Needs program, supported by teachers, staff, and fellow students, showcased sculptures and paintings full of creativity, individuality, and pride.

The event was a joyful reflection of the school's well-earned reputation for inclusion, standing out as a beacon of community-led empowerment in the atoll. It was a powerful reminder that true inclusion is built not just through policy, but through celebration, recognition, and the shared belief that every child can shine.

To see more of our community based celebrations days head over to the community section and you can see our World Turtle Day and World Environment Day Celebrations with the local community.



# OUR HOSTS

Our purpose is simple yet profound: to inspire a deep love for the ocean and its extraordinary marine life. With this vision at heart, we invite hosts from every department to step beyond their comfort zones and join us in discovering the wonders of the underwater world.

While we all share life on an island, not everyone has had the opportunity to truly connect with the ocean's beauty and significance. For many, their first experience beneath the surface happens with us, a moment of awe, discovery, and transformation.

These first encounters are what inspire us most. They energize our team and reaffirm our commitment to creating meaningful experiences, nurturing a lasting connection to the ocean, and fostering a shared responsibility to protect it.



**870** educational moments with hosts



**287** hosts visited the SHELL

## HOST ACTIVITIES RUN BY MUI

- Host snorkel boat
- House Reef and Seagrass Snorkel
- Host Dolphin Cruise
- Marine life presentations
- Turtle nest watch training
- Turtle hatching training
- Coral spawning training





## HOST RESEARCH IMMERSIONS

Throughout the year, the team offers research immersions for hosts from across departments, inviting them to join research boats for fieldwork days at Hithadhoo Corner, where they observe scuba surveys, ID photograph collection, Eyes on the Reef (EOTR) camera deployment, and Stereo-Video Photogrammetry (SVP) manta measurements firsthand.

These immersions complement World Manta Week celebrations and are designed to strengthen connections between departments, deepen hosts' ability to share accurate conservation messages with guests, and foster a personal commitment to protecting the marine environment.

## HIDDEN GEMS IN THE SEAGRASS

This year, the team completed educational seagrass sessions with Six Senses Laamu's Guest Experience Makers (GEMs), the resort's direct guest contact who also play a crucial role in communicating our conservation message.

Sessions combined theory on the vital roles of seagrass ecosystems with a snorkelling portion, building both the GEMs' confidence in communicating its importance and their personal passion for it. These sessions aim to help the GEMs shift negative guest perceptions of seagrass and send visitors home with a new appreciation for the ecosystem.



# MANGROVE CLEAN-UP

To mark International Coastal Cleanup Day, Six Senses Laamu and the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) joined forces with the community of Hithadhoo for a morning defined by teamwork, energy and a shared commitment to the ocean.

In total, 33 Six Senses hosts worked alongside 64 members of the Hithadhoo community, including representatives from the island council, school students, the women's development committee and local health clinic staff. Together, the group focused on cleaning the island's Marine Protected Area mangrove—a vital habitat for fish, birds and countless other species, and one that is particularly vulnerable to pollution.



Over two hours, the mangrove was transformed through collective effort. Large piles of palm leaves and coconut shells were cleared, reducing mosquito breeding sites and rodent shelter, while bags of rubbish—plastic wrappers, bottles and drink cans—were removed from this sensitive ecosystem. The island council is now weighing and recording the collected waste, ensuring Hithadhoo's contribution is reflected in the global data from International Coastal Cleanup Day.

The morning concluded with a shared breakfast and a refreshing swim in the calm mangrove waters. The laughter, conversations and sense of achievement underscored that this was more than a clean-up—it was a celebration of community spirit and collective responsibility for the environments that sustain us.

By standing alongside millions of people worldwide on International Coastal Cleanup Day, Hithadhoo demonstrated how local action can create lasting impact. In total, the clean-up removed 20 kg of plastic, 25 kg of glass, 43 kg of cans, and approximately 5,000 kg of coconut palms and fruits—a meaningful step towards healthier mangroves, cleaner oceans and a more resilient future for Laamu Atoll.

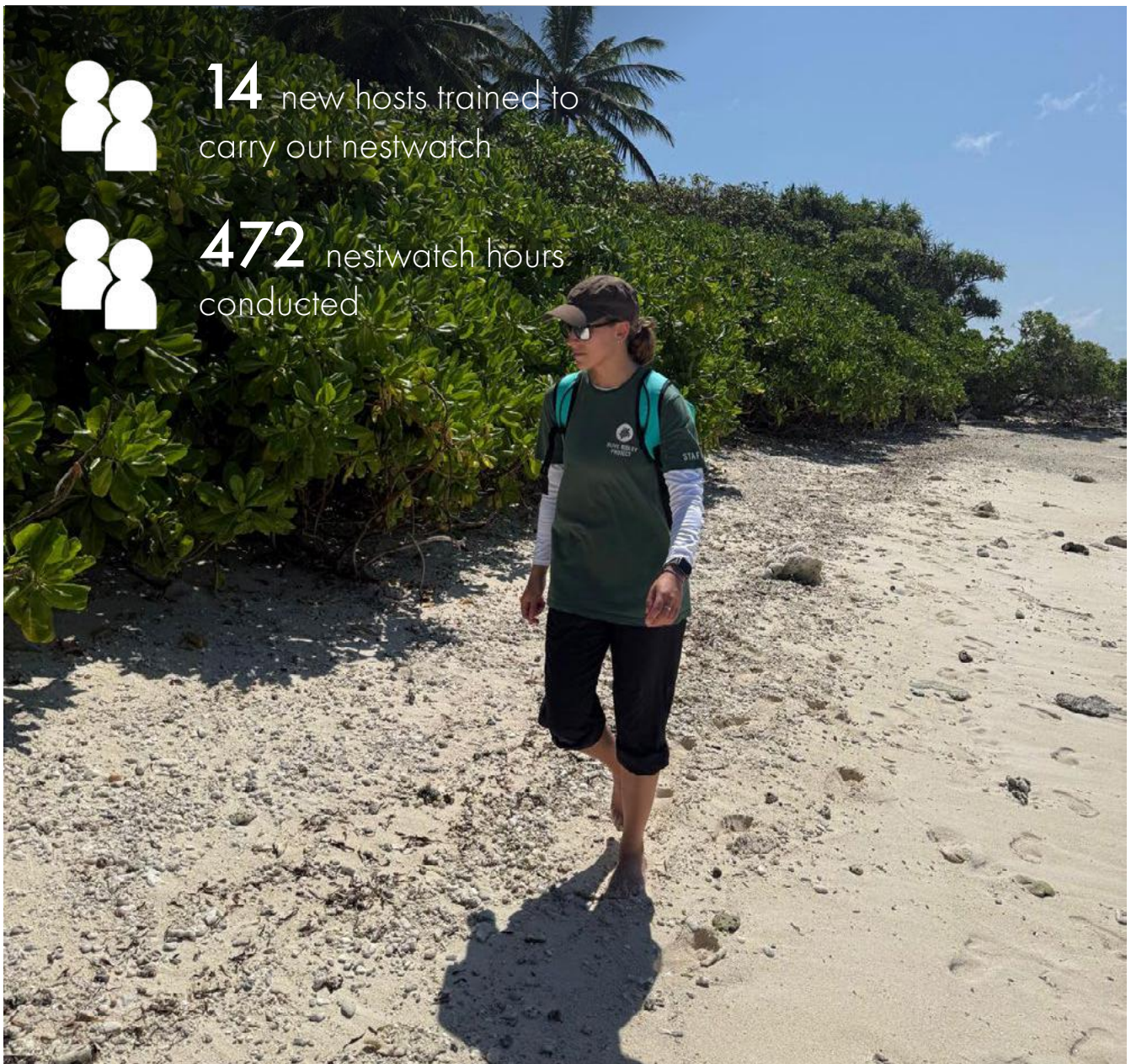


# NESTWATCH, TURTLE ID-TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

For many years there has been a strong relationship between ORP biologists and the resort gardening team when it comes to turtle nesting. Several members of the team are skilled in finding turtle egg chambers and have a lot of local knowledge of turtle nesting behaviour. This is invaluable to the biologists who can learn a huge amount from them.

The purpose of this training was to explain a little bit more about ORP's work, discuss some small changes and most importantly to invite the gardening team to hatching and excavation events. There have been remarks in the past that they have felt excluded from such activities despite helping with the initial stages of the nest. Now, hopefully they would feel confident to join such occasions and are in the correct messaging groups to receive updates.

The gardening team also provided training to the ORP team as well as other MUI team members. They offered their time to talk about the behaviour of Olhuveli's nesting turtles and some tips to find egg chambers from new nests. The meeting also gave the opportunity for everyone to discuss their different turtle experiences and theories which was very interesting.





# OUR COMMUNITY



Community engagement is one of the core pillars of MUI , grounded in the belief that long-term marine conservation is only possible when communities are informed, involved, and empowered. MUI's community work focuses on building ocean literacy, strengthening local stewardship, and creating accessible opportunities for people of all ages to connect with the marine environment.

Throughout 2025, the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) maintained a strong and consistent presence across community engagement and education, reaching thousands of individuals through hands-on interactions, festivals, school-based outreach, and collaborative public events.

Within Laamu Atoll, the MUI team engaged with 800+ community members, including students, educators, local organisations, councils, and visitors, through a range of educational sessions, island visits, guided experiences, and interactive activities. These engagements focused on marine conservation, ocean literacy, and strengthening local connections to the marine environment, reinforcing MUI's commitment to long-term, place-based impact.



# SMALL ACTIONS, LASTING IMPACT

## MAAMENDHOO SEN CLASSROOM

In a small island community, even the simplest interventions can create meaningful change. One year on, Maamendhoo's Special Educational Needs (SEN) classroom stands as a powerful example of how targeted support through the Sustainability Fund can transform lives.

Established with support from Six Senses Laamu's Sustainability Fund and led by local educator and conservation champion Naila Miss, the SEN classroom was designed to provide an inclusive learning environment for children with diverse educational needs. Today, the classroom is fully operational and supports 15 students through tailored learning approaches, interactive tools, and a space created specifically to help them feel safe, confident, and supported.


Over the course of 2025, the impact of this small but intentional project has continued to grow. The classroom has become a place of routine, creativity, and belonging for students who previously had limited access to specialised learning support. Equipped with age appropriate resources, including educational games, visual learning tools, and creative materials, the space allows students to engage with lessons in ways that suit their individual strengths.

This impact was further strengthened through the generosity of resort guests. During a recent visit, Community Engagement Coordinator Fithura (Fithu) delivered 110 donated items to the classroom, including books, puzzles, and art supplies. These contributions added depth to the learning experience, encouraging exploration, play, and self expression within the classroom.



 109 guest donation items gifted



  
1 special educational needs classroom funded through Sustainability fund, now 1 year in successful operation

The response from students was immediate and heartfelt. The joy and pride they showed in using the new materials highlighted the importance of giving children a space that feels like their own. For the community, the classroom represents more than education. It represents inclusion, dignity, and opportunity.

The Maamendhoo SEN classroom demonstrates how Sustainability Fund projects, even at a small scale, can create lasting social impact. By supporting locally led initiatives that respond directly to community needs, the fund continues to help strengthen island communities and ensure that every child is given the chance to learn, grow, and thrive.

# WORLD TURTLE DAY CELEBRATIONS ON HITHADHOO



150+ community members  
joined the event



90 turtle bags and 6 turtle  
handbooks donated to community

To mark World Turtle Day 2025, the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) hosted a community celebration in Hithadhoo, bringing together more than 150 community members to learn about sea turtle conservation.

The event featured interactive activities for all ages, including turtle themed games, a virtual reality dive experience, and marine animal face painting. Alongside the activities, the MUI team shared information about the sea turtles found in Laamu Atoll, how researchers identify

and monitor them, and the threats they face such as illegal harvesting and habitat disturbance.

The event created an opportunity for families, children, and community members to learn, ask questions, and connect with the importance of protecting sea turtles. By encouraging open dialogue and shared learning, the celebration highlighted the value of community engagement in strengthening conservation awareness and long term stewardship of marine life.



# WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY



70 community members interacted with through the festival



33 students joined for snorkel

World Environment Day turned into a weekend full of events, fun, education and new experiences for the Laamu community supported by Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR).

With this year's theme of plastic pollution, the weekend was kicked off with a huge community driven beach clean up event. Members of MRR joined in full force, helping to contribute to the collection of over 900kg of plastic from Laamu Gan's beaches. The day then moved into the #Beyondplastic festival, hosted by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. At the festival, MRR's stall aimed to encourage the community to say no to single use plastics through secret messages. Messages such as 'Skip a straw, save a turtle' and 'Stop making plastic a habit', were written in white crayon on white paper. Members of the community were invited to the stall to paint over the paper, revealing the important messages.

Day two began with the #UjaalaLaamu snorkelling event. Over thirty students from ten schools across Laamu atoll were brought over to Gan to experience its amazing house reef. Together with the Ministry, coast guard, Laamu Gan regional hospital, Maldives police service and our partnering NGOs we not only taught these young reef champions how to snorkel safely, but why the reef matters. Some of the students snorkeled for the first time, exploring the reef and spotting fish, and began to understand the delicate balance of our reef ecosystems. Watching their faces light up as they discovered the reef's secrets and feeling the buzz of excitement after exiting the water reminded all of us why community engagement is the cornerstone of resilient reefs.

In the evening we had the pleasure of screening this year's top conservation movie, OCEAN by Sir David Attenborough, for the community and students at Ghiyassudheen International School. People of all ages gathered for a night of popcorn and meaningful conversations about our planet, reminding us there is nowhere more important for life on Earth than the ocean.



# TEACHING IN THE COMMUNITY



At MUI, building local capacity and empowering communities is a core part of our mission as a team of marine biologists working alongside national and international partners. In 2025, this approach came to life through collaborative projects with Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR) and the Olive Ridley Project (ORP), strengthening marine conservation from reefs to classrooms across Laamu Atoll.

Working closely with MRR, the MUI team supported the celebration of the successful completion of the Community-Based Reef Monitoring and Fish Assemblages Project on the island of Gan. Funded by ENDhERI and supported by Laamu Atoll Councils and Women's Development Committees, the event brought together the MRR team, local councils, ENDhERI representatives and trained citizen scientists to recognise a milestone in community-led science. For MUI, this project represented more than data collection—it showcased how equipping local people with scientific skills creates long-term stewards of the marine environment.

Through the programme, 16 new Discovery Scuba Divers, 10 Open Water Divers and four certified EcoDivers gained the skills needed to monitor reef health and contribute meaningfully to conservation efforts. One of the most powerful moments came when two citizen scientists shared their experiences and findings from Reef Check surveys at Baresdhoo Beyru Faru, demonstrating the value of local knowledge when paired with scientific training.



MUI also contributed to capacity building through the Maldives National University and ENDhERI Basic Ranger Training Course, delivering hands-on training in seagrass and coral reef monitoring. Participants from Laamu, Addu and Baa atolls explored some of the Maldives' most biodiverse reefs in Laamu Atoll, gaining practical skills and confidence to support future conservation and management roles.

Education and outreach extended beyond the water through our partnership with the Olive Ridley Project (ORP). On 7 May 2025, ORP's Laamu team led a teacher training session at Maavah School, supported by the shared goal of strengthening marine conservation education. Educators from preschool to secondary levels were introduced to the Sea Turtle Handbook and explored ways to embed marine conservation themes across school curricula. Despite challenging weather conditions, the session sparked valuable discussions and new plans for closer collaboration with local schools.

Together, these partnerships reflect MUI's role as a hub for marine science, training and collaboration—where biologists, citizen scientists, educators and partner organisations work together to protect the Maldives' reefs and marine life, ensuring conservation knowledge is shared both underwater and within the community.



# WELCOMING COMMUNITY TO THE SHELL

Throughout the year, the Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) and Six Senses Laamu team welcomed 145 participants from schools, organisations, and community groups to the SHELL and the resort for educational sessions focused on marine conservation, sustainability, and environmental awareness.

These engagements included visits from 18 officers from the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), as well as several school groups from across Laamu Atoll and beyond. Students from the Dhanbidhoo BTEC Hospitality Programme visited the resort for an exposure trip to learn about sustainability practices within the hospitality sector.

Community engagement activities also included Maamendhoo School's World Sea Turtle Day visit, where 20 students and 5 teachers joined the team to learn

about sea turtle conservation in the Maldives. Students from Billabong International School travelled to Laamu for an educational tour of The SHELL and Earth Lab, with 24 students and 6 teachers participating.

In addition, 40 participants from the BTEC Hospitality, Travel and Tourism programme joined a resort exposure tour, while 20 Nature Club students and 5 teachers visited the resort to mark World Soil Day, exploring the importance of soil health and sustainable practices.

Through these visits and workshops, MUI and the Six Senses Laamu team continue to create opportunities for students and community members to connect with nature, strengthen environmental awareness, and learn about conservation efforts taking place in Laamu Atoll.



# MUI ATTEND LHAVIYANI TURTLE FESTIVAL

The Maldives Underwater Initiative (MUI) participated in the eighth Lhaviyani Turtle Festival in Naifaru, contributing to both the Atoll Marine Symposium and the public festival day. The two-day event brought together communities, conservation organisations, schools, and resorts to promote dialogue, learning, and collaboration around marine conservation.

During the Atoll Marine Symposium, held under the theme Currents of Connection: Communities, Culture, and Conservation, four MUI team members contributed to panels and presentations on reef systems, manta movements, turtle ecology, and community-led conservation. Community Engagement Coordinator Aishath Fithura delivered a keynote presentation,



Laamaseelu Laamu, highlighting how locally led initiatives supported through the Six Senses Laamu Sustainability Fund have created meaningful conservation impact in Laamu Atoll.

The second day saw more than 3,000 community members gather for the public festival in Naifaru. MUI hosted interactive activities including a virtual reality manta dive experience and a sustainable fishing game, helping students learn about marine life and responsible ocean stewardship. Visitors also explored the Atoll Marine

Centre's turtle rehabilitation facility, gaining insight into the threats turtles face and the importance of conservation.

Overall, the festival brought together 14 schools, 18 organisations, and more than 100 symposium participants, while a pre-festival school challenge collected over 500 kilograms of plastic bottles. The event demonstrated the power of combining science, culture, and community engagement to inspire stronger protection of the Maldives' marine ecosystems.



# SUSTAINABILITY FUND

The sustainability fund of Six Senses Laamu offers microgrants to community groups in Laamu to lead projects that benefit the local communities. The sustainability fund covers projects that focus on marine conservation, waste management, single-use plastic reduction, health care and sanitation improvement, education aid, and sustainable community development.

## HYDRA PLASTIC FREE WATER

In January 2025, the Saafu Hithadhoo initiative led by Hithadhoo Youth Development and Recreation Association (HYDRA) was approved for support through the Six Senses Laamu Sustainability Fund. The project responds to the island's reliance on rainwater for drinking and the widespread use of plastic bottles for water storage, which contributes to plastic waste and the risk of microplastic contamination.

The initiative focuses on reducing plastic usage, improving access to clean drinking water, and strengthening waste management practices across Hithadhoo. By introducing practical alternatives and community-led actions, Saafu Hithadhoo aims to create long-term behavioural change while protecting public health and the local environment.

Key components of the project include:

- Distribution of reusable glass bottles to households to reduce dependence on plastic water containers
- Educational sessions highlighting the environmental and health impacts of plastic pollution

- Installation of durable dustbins in communal areas, supported by regular maintenance
- An island-wide clean-up competition designed to encourage community participation and collective responsibility

As of this reporting period, HYDRA has successfully distributed three reusable glass bottles to every household on the island, supporting a shift away from plastic-based water storage. Public dustbins have also been installed across Hithadhoo, improving access to proper waste disposal and helping maintain cleaner shared spaces.

Saafu Hithadhoo demonstrates how locally led initiatives, supported through the Sustainability Fund, can deliver tangible environmental and social benefits. The project is expected to contribute to reduced plastic consumption, cleaner public areas, improved awareness around plastic pollution, and stronger community engagement. HYDRA will continue to monitor progress through community feedback and surveys as the initiative develops.



**1,333** community members  
impacted through the project



**625** glass water bottles  
donated



**6,108** kg of total produce grown



**6** awareness sessions conducted



**1** water purification system installed



## FAHIGOVAAN GREENHOUSE FACILITY

The Fahigovaan Greenhouse Facility, led by Fonadhoo Environment and Sustainable Development (FESD), demonstrates how targeted Sustainability Fund support can strengthen local food systems and build long term resilience in island communities.

The 2025 harvest outcomes, which included 2,234 kg of melon, 1,920 kg of cucumber, 1,320 kg of watermelon, 510 kg of lettuce, and 124 kg of tomato, shows the potential of sustainable investment. In addition to increased output, the greenhouse now produces more consistent and predictable yields, strengthening its long term viability.

The FESD team continue to innovate within the system. They developed a coir peat maker to process locally sourced coconut husks into growing medium, reducing dependence on imported inputs and reinforcing circular,

island based agricultural practices.

The facility has also become a platform for learning and community engagement. Through workshops, training sessions, and educational visits, 316 students have been introduced to climate smart agriculture concepts and modern farming systems. These interactions support broader understanding of sustainable food production and island food security.

The Fahigovaan Greenhouse now operates as a stable and productive community asset. By addressing a critical technical barrier and supporting locally led solutions, this Sustainability Fund project has contributed to improved agricultural output, strengthened skills, and increased confidence within the community. It reflects how focused investment can enable practical, lasting impact in small island settings.





# OUR VOICE



# SOCIAL MEDIA



@maldivesunderwaterinitiative



MaldivesUnderwaterInitiative

In 2025, the Maldives Underwater Initiative continued to strengthen its digital presence, expanding how we share our work and connect with audiences around the world. Our social media platforms saw steady growth throughout the year, with increasing engagement across research updates, community stories, and behind-the-scenes conservation work in Laamu Atoll. Visual storytelling and regular content helped bring our science and partnerships to life, reaching new audiences and deepening connections with existing supporters.

Alongside this, the MUI website underwent significant development, with the addition of many new pages showcasing our research, education, community programmes, and partnerships. New blog posts and stories provided deeper insight into both our scientific work and the people behind it. Of particular interest is our new 'Day in the Life of a Marine Biologist' stories, which can be found in our monthly Blue and Green newsletter as well as in our website blog. Together, these digital platforms have become an increasingly important tool for amplifying MUI's impact and sharing Laamu's conservation story with the world.

@ 13,000+ website visits



17,953 followers



MUI TEAM • 11/30/25

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MARINE BIOLOGIST - TALIA - MUI INTERN

In this month's series: "A day in the life of a Marine Biologist", we will be talking to and learning from **Talia**, MUI's marine biology intern.

[Read More](#)



MUI TEAM • 11/25/25

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MARINE BIOLOGIST - JULIETTE - TURTLE BIOLOGIST

In this month's series of "A day in the life of a Marine Biologist", we will be talking to and learning from **Juliette**, MUI's turtle biologist and guest educator.

[Read More](#)



MUI TEAM • 10/21/25

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MARINE BIOLOGIST - HADIN - CORAL RESEARCHER

Welcome to our exciting new series: "A day in the life of a Marine Biologist", where we invite you to learn more about our MUI staff and their day to day life. This month we will be talking to and learning from **Hadin**, MUI's Coral researcher.

[Read More](#)



MUI TEAM • 8/30/25

### A YEAR OF LEARNING: MAAMENDHOO'S SEN CLASSROOM

Discover how **Maamendhoo's** first **SEN classroom**, supported by Six Senses Laamu, is transforming **inclusive education** in the Maldives with joy and opportunity.

[Read More](#)



MUI TEAM • 7/31/25

### SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH CINEMATOGRAPHER MARK SHARMAN

In this special Q&A with underwater **cinematographer Mark Shorman**, whose footage of Laamu was recently published in **Ocean by David Attenborough**, Mark shares his experiences filming with MUI to tell science-driven stories from the reef.

[Read More](#)



MUI TEAM • 6/30/25


### FIRST MAJOR CORAL PLANTING IN LAAMU

Led by MUI's coral biologist **Coco**, the team recently **outplanted** their first **64 baby corals**—marking a hopeful step towards rebuilding the Maldives' vibrant reef ecosystems.

[Read More](#)

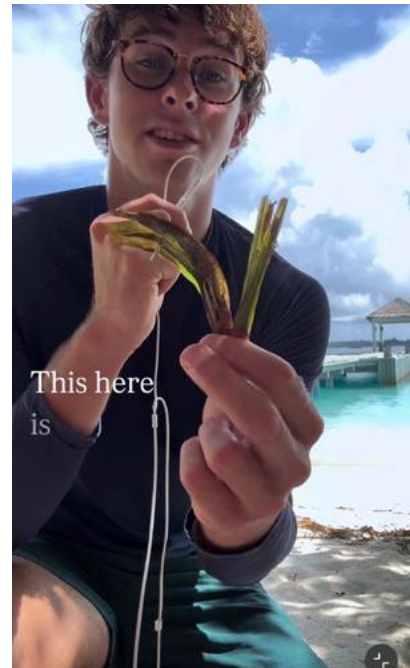
# YOUR FAVOURITES



 45k views



 25k views



 133k views

## A YEAR OF GLOBAL RECOGNITION

In 2025, MUI received widespread media attention, reflecting the growing impact and relevance of its conservation, research, and community work in Laamu Atoll. Coverage in leading international and regional publications helped share MUI's story far beyond the Maldives, amplifying local efforts on a global stage.

Major outlets including Forbes, National Geographic Traveller, and Scuba Diving Magazine featured MUI's work, highlighting themes such as our coral research and restoration, sustainable fisheries, marine megafauna protection, and the role of responsible tourism in ocean conservation. Regional publications such as Hotelier Maldives, alongside lifestyle and travel platforms

including Travel + Leisure Asia and Beautilist, further showcased how science, community partnerships, and guest engagement are driving meaningful change in Laamu.

Together, these 2025 features demonstrate how MUI's work is contributing to wider conversations about climate resilience and ocean stewardship. The breadth of coverage not only celebrates MUI's achievements, but also helps elevate Maldivian-led conservation stories—ensuring that lessons from Laamu continue to inspire action well beyond the atoll.



**6** articles, podcasts and press releases were published featuring MUI and sustainability at Six Senses Laamu

# OUR 2025 AWARDS

In 2025, MUI added three prestigious accolades to its growing list of honours: the Maldives Hotelier CSR Award, a Gold Award from ICRT's Nature Positive programme, and a place in the International Sustainability Awards' TOP 100 of the World.

These awards reflect MUI's continued commitment to marine conservation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable hospitality — and serve as recognition that conservation and exceptional guest experiences remain at the heart of everything MUI does.



Maldives Hotelier CSR award



ICRT Nature Positive (Gold Award)



2025 TOP 100 of the World by the International  
Sustainability Awards

# INSPIRING MINDS: OCEAN STORIES

In 2025, once again, Six Senses Laamu was a hub of inspiration, welcoming extraordinary voices from science, sport, exploration, and storytelling, each offering a unique perspective on resilience, curiosity, and our relationship with the ocean.

Steve Backshall's return to Laamu was a highlight of the year, drawing record audiences across multiple presentations on Laamu's marine life, species behaviour, and ocean acoustics. He snorkelled and filmed alongside the MUI team, engaged young ocean enthusiasts through a children's screening and Q&A, and praised the SHELL as one of the finest marine research centres in the region.

Helen Glover OBE, four-time Olympic rowing champion, brought a different but equally powerful form of inspiration. Her personal account of returning to elite sport after starting a family and redefining what is possible for women and mothers in high-performance athletics resonated deeply with guests and hosts alike, offering a reminder that meaningful change begins with belief in oneself.

World-renowned underwater photographer Dr. Alex Mustard returned as both artist and educator, delivering hands-on underwater photography training to the MUI and Deep Blue Divers teams. Alongside explorer and broadcaster Steve Backshall, Alex delivered a captivating evening presentation on the Arrival Jetty, using striking imagery to reveal Laamu's extraordinary biodiversity while confronting the realities of coral bleaching. Their shared message was clear: powerful storytelling can turn awareness into action.

Rounding out the year, former MUI Base Leader Greg Holder brought innovation into the water itself. Through groundbreaking Narrated Dive Experience, Greg gave guests rare access to the reef through live underwater commentary using a Guardian Full-face scuba mask. His Arrival Jetty presentations on shark ecology and fish intelligence further challenged assumptions and sparked curiosity.

Together, these visits reinforced Six Senses Laamu's role as a place where science meets storytelling, education meets experience, and every encounter becomes an invitation to care more deeply for the ocean.



# BORN FROM THE REEF HEADS TO THE AWARD CEREMONIES

One of the biggest challenges in conservation today is finding ways to bridge the disconnect between people and the natural world. As people's lives have become more digital, this distance has allowed for many environmental crises to go unnoticed. For former MUI intern, Owen Bornhorst, this issue can not be solved by data alone. Instead, he looks to storytelling as a way to reconnect and inspire, turning science into something relatable.

During his three-month internship with MUI, Owen had one main goal: create his first film. After meeting former coral biologist, Coco Ahmed, he knew he had found the perfect subject. Before joining MUI, Owen had previously been studying coral bleaching. This new project centered around Coco and MUI's research on coral larval restoration was the perfect blend of his passions in research and storytelling.



8 international screenings

# BORN FROM

A FILM BY OWEN



Creating his first film was filled with ups and downs. From research equipment failing just nights before the spawning event to scrambling to the weather throwing a wrench in filming plans, it was an invaluable learning experience. The biggest obstacle ended up being the most compelling part of the story: whether or not the coral would spawn. For his first two months, the corals showed no signs of spawning, likely due to the severe bleaching they had experienced just months before. During the last full moon of his stay, he was diving every single night in hopes of capturing the event. Finally, after six nights of 3 hour surveys, it finally happened. Witnessing coral spawning for the first time is still his favorite moment he has experienced underwater. After the months of preparation,

it was a surreal experience to finish out his internship.

'Born from the Reef' was finally completed in May. As of December 2025, 'Born from the Reef' has received official selections at five different film festivals, and recently **won the award for the Best Ocean Film at the 2025 Earth in Focus Nature Film Festival**. Coco's story has reached audiences across the world, from the United States to Singapore. On top of being able to use the title "award-winning filmmaker", seeing his film resonate with audiences around the globe has been the highlight of his career. Looking forward, he wants to continue creating films that bridge science and public understanding to reconnect people and nature.



**6** official film festival selections



**1** win for best ocean film

# BORN FROM THE REEF

BY BEN BORNHORST

2025  
WINNER

earth  
in focus

NATURE  
FILM FESTIVAL



## MUI JOINS CBASS



### 9 day training workshop

Our coral researcher Hadin was selected for the Maldivian scholarship and attended the CBASS workshop (Coral Bleaching Automated Stress System) , a 9 day hands-on, in-water/out-of-water practical program. With this experiment we can determine the thermal resilience of certain corals, an invaluable resource for coral research.

During this workshop, Hadin learned how to collect coral colony samples with specialised equipment while diving, and conduct underwater benthic surveys. He also learned how to set up CBASS assay and design CBASS experiments and analyze that CBASS thermal stress data using R. In addition to this, it was an extremely productive workshop as he gained new insight and perspective from all of the amazing marine biologists that attended this program alongside him. These valuable skills, knowledge and connections will be taken back to Laamu where we can better understand and protect our illustrious coral reefs.

The CBASS Workshop was held by the Marine Research and High Education Center (MaRHE Center) of the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy on Magoodhoo Island, Faafu Atoll, Maldives. The program was led by Prof. Christian R Voolstra, a renowned coral reef researcher who established and co-developed CBASS thermal assays and the CBASSED50 R package for CBASS thermal tolerance data, and was also coordinated and organized by Prof. Davide Seveso, Vice-director of MaRHE Center and Enrico Montalbetti from MaRHE Center. We would like to thank them for giving us the opportunity to attend this workshop.

## THEVELI CONFERENCE

At this years 8th annual Theveli international conference held by the Maldives National University, Olive Ridley Projects Gadhoo Turtle Ranger, Inaan, was invited to present on his work in Laamu.

The conferences theme this year was "evolving paradigms, merging research, evidence and practice" which fitted right in with Inaan's presentation titled "the successes and challenges of the Ranger Programs", in which he gave a brief overview and background of how ORP started the projects in Laamu and the historical data from both locations.

After giving an update of the project, Inaan talked about the challenges and how they were tackled and how much progress has been made in the past couple of years. Inaan wrapped up with plans about the future of the project, providing inspiration and hope to the attendants.





## SEAGRASS INDUSTRY LEADERS

Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR) took a major step forward for seagrass conservation in 2025 with the launch of the #SeagrassIndustryLeaders Circle, turning years of advocacy into coordinated action.

The initiative was launched during a three-day event on Dhiffushi Island, building on the 2019 #ProtectMaldivesSeagrass campaign. Led in partnership with Blue Marine Foundation, the event brought together marine biologists, sustainability managers from early-adopter and prospective resorts, seagrass experts and Maldivian government representatives. Workshops explored the challenges of seagrass conservation in a tourism-driven nation, effective guest education, and the role of seagrass as an Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM), alongside practical and theoretical monitoring training.

A key outcome was the commitment of 17 resorts—11 with seagrass and six without—to join the #SeagrassIndustryLeaders Circle. Signatories pledged to voluntarily protect at least 80% of baseline seagrass areas, stop damaging practices such as seagrass removal, and educate staff and guests on the importance of seagrass for nature and tourism.



## 6 industry leaders trained in seagrass monitoring

Six Senses Laamu and MUI continue to lead by example, having protected seagrass meadows around the resort since 2019. Director of Sustainability Lawrence Menz signed the pledge and spoke on the panel “Maldives: a rare global seagrass bright spot,” while MUI Research Coordinator Dr Nisha Goldsworthy delivered training on seagrass guest snorkels and monitoring surveys.

This momentum was strengthened through a national drone-based seagrass monitoring workshop held from 29 June to 1 July 2025. Participants from government, NGOs, academia and the tourism sector were trained in safe drone operations, flight planning and high-resolution habitat mapping, while collaboratively developing a national drone mapping protocol to standardise seagrass monitoring across the Maldives.

Drone imagery is already being collected in L. Hithadhoo to track changes within the Community Conservation Area, with further surveys planned at resorts in the #SeagrassIndustryLeaders Circle. Together, these initiatives mark a shift from awareness to action, embedding science-led, collaborative seagrass protection at the heart of Maldivian tourism.

# 2025 LAAMU STORIES

## WHERE ARE OUR INTERNS NOW?

Our 2025 Annual Report felt like the perfect moment to reflect on the journeys of our interns over the past year. For many, MUI represented their first professional step into marine conservation — gaining hands-on field experience, developing skills in scientific research, guest education, and deepening their understanding of marine biology in one of the largest marine biology teams in the Maldives.

Watching those early experiences translate into thriving careers is one of our greatest sources of pride and we can see how their work is continuing to make an impact across the field. Look out for more detailed spotlights on our former interns in the 2026 editions of Blue and Greens.



### HADIN

#### MUI INTERN IN 2025, NOW: CORAL RESEARCHER FOR THE MUI TEAM

Hadin first joined the MUI team as an intern early in 2025 and is now working as the current Coral Researcher based at Six Senses Laamu. In addition to educating guests through crafted experiences, Hadin is responsible for overseeing our ex-situ coral systems and also in charge of our coral restoration projects such as micro-fragmentation and larval restoration.

Hadin started working as the Coral researcher in August, but has been with the MUI team since May. Relatively new to the conservation field, he has spent 10 months in the marine sector. Hadin was raised from the capital of Maldives, Male, and his enthusiasm for animals and working closely with them has been his goal as far as he can remember. Always equipped with a curious and inquisitive attitude to everything in the natural world, he is currently interested in corals and seagrass which make up the wonderful habitats of our beloved fauna. Hadin is hoping to improve his diving skills while he is here!

"Straight after finishing my education, I was fortunate enough to get an internship from The Olive Ridley Project in 2024, which gave me valuable experience of working in the conservation field and of course, a wealth of turtle knowledge. Afterwards I was volunteering for Welfare for Island Cats when I heard of the internship program at MUI, and applied. I was here as an intern starting from May 2025, and had the incredible opportunity of working alongside many talented marine biologists in MUI, including the previous Coral Researcher Maahil 'Coco' Ahmed. I admire the way he conducts research and how extremely knowledgeable he is in this field and hope to follow his example!"



# SHAROOF

ORP INTERN IN 2025, NOW:

## GADHOO ASSISTANT TURTLE RANGER IN LAAMU

Growing up, attending the Laamafaru Festival at L.Maabaidhoo in 2018 was one of Sharoof's first introductions to marine conservation. He found it exciting to see people talking about the ocean, sea turtles, and reefs. Even though these topics were intriguing to Sharoof, he felt like he had no knowledge about how to move forward in the field at that time. However, it gave him a sense of awareness about the marine environment, and that it was something worth protecting.

As Sharoof got older, he was introduced to the Sea Turtle Ranger Programme through Ibrahim Inaan the current Sea Turtle Ranger Programme Coordinator for Laamu and accompanied him on surveys to L. Gaadhoo. Those experiences were his first hands-on exposure to sea turtle conservation and helped him to understand what the work actually involves, both the challenges and the responsibility.

After this, Sharoof interned with Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR), where he learned more about the wider marine environment and how different ecosystems are connected. This helped broaden his understanding beyond a single species and gave him a stronger foundation in marine conservation.

When the opportunity arose, Sharoof joined the Olive Ridley Project as a Sea Turtle Biologist intern, where he got more experience working with turtles, both nesting and in water. Now I am working as an Assistant Sea Turtle Ranger at Laamu Gaadhoo. In this role, my main responsibilities are conducting nesting beach surveys, data collection, and education efforts, helping to protect one of the most important turtle nesting sites in the Maldives.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of wood. The wood is covered in a thick layer of vibrant green moss. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting. The text 'OUR HOME' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

# OUR HOME





## SIX SENSES STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

Mohamed Ibrahim (Kuday) from our Engineering team turned discarded wood into impactful wildlife awareness signs, giving new purpose to leftover materials while supporting conservation. These thoughtfully crafted signs help protect our booming Kanbili (White-breasted Waterhen) population by raising awareness among both guests and hosts, reinforcing our commitment to biodiversity protection and circular practices.

Kanbili is the national bird of the Maldives and is a protected species across the nation. Easily recognized by its striking white face and breast, dark grey back, and reddish-brown under-tail, it is commonly found near wetlands, lagoons, and mangrove areas. They are known for their distinctive, echoing calls at dawn and dusk. Often seen foraging for insects and seeds, guests and hosts love to see these birds around the island.

In recognition of his creativity and dedication, Kuday was named Six Senses Sustainability Hero for the month of December. We sincerely thank him for his meaningful contribution to wildlife awareness and environmental education!



Six Senses Laamu proudly showcases the creative work of Adam Zameer (Kokky), Assistant Restaurant Manager, whose passion for sustainability transforms recycled materials like plastic bottles, old placemats, and tin cans into unique accessories now featured in the resort's boutique.

Kokky consistently transforms discarded materials into beautiful creations that add charm and ambiance to our dining settings. His "Herb of the Day" bottles and handmade candle holders for dinners, crafted from repurposed glass bottles, are perfect examples of how sustainability and creativity can come together to enrich the guest journey.



## IPOY RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

Six Senses Laamu partnered with EIT InnoEnergy SELECT students as part of the 2024-2025 Integrated Project of the Year (IPOY), bringing fresh perspective to one of our most pressing challenges: how to continue reducing our environmental footprint as a remote, off-grid island resort.. A team of eight Master's students found pathways for lowering our carbon emissions and reliance on diesel.

In alignment with Six Senses Laamu's commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 46% by 2030, the IPOY team conducted site audits, technical feasibility assessments, and financial modeling to propose ideas for clean energy and efficiency measures.

A key focus of the project was understanding how solar energy can be better used at the resort. While solar panels are already installed, the study showed that not all available sunlight is currently being turned into usable energy, particularly during the middle of the day. Improving renewable energy planning, operation, and siting could help us increase the share of clean energy in our operations and reduce reliance on fossil fuels over time. The project highlights a range of options across different time scales.

 8 students visited for 7 days

Near-term interventions such as battery storage and implementing targeted energy efficiency measures offer quick payback periods and emissions reductions. Medium- and long-term options, including rooftop solar expansion and carefully sited floating solar, will help us decarbonise while respecting spatial, visual, and ecological constraints unique to our resort.

Overall, the IPOY Renewable Energy Project provides a clear and flexible roadmap for Six Senses Laamu to continue our energy transition and meet our goals. By supporting this work, Six Senses Laamu strengthens its leadership in sustainable hospitality and demonstrates a measured approach to climate action in the Maldives. We extend our thanks to the IPOY team for their thorough and insightful work, and we look forward to collaborating across resort teams to explore and implement next steps beginning in 2026.

# SUSTAINABLE LIVING



**5,180 kg** organic greens harvested at Six Senses Laamu



**4,829** eggs collected from Kukulhu Village



**8,950 kg** compost generated at Six Senses Laamu



**53 ltrs** of coconut oil made



**539,888 kWh** of power generated from solar panels at Six Senses Laamu



**166** paper sheets made



**1,820 ltrs** of oil recycled



**58,350 kg** wood donated to fish factory



**940 kg** cloth recycled (given to local community)



**33,985 kg** cardboard donated to fish factory



**1,056 kg** glass crushed



**53 kg** soap made



**840 kg** plastic recycled



# MANGROVE TOURS IN HITHADHOO

The Hithadhoo mangroves are among the most serene and picturesque habitats in Laamu Atoll. Designated as one of the atoll's six Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), this unique ecosystem plays a vital ecological role—supporting biodiversity, protecting coastlines, and storing significant amounts of blue carbon. Over the past two years, it has also become a powerful example of how conservation and community-led tourism can thrive together.

Launched as Laamu's first community-led ecotourism activity within a Marine Protected Area, the Hithadhoo mangrove kayaking experience has now been running successfully for two years. Developed by the island council, the initiative provides a tangible economic incentive to protect the mangrove forest, while offering visitors a rare opportunity to experience its quiet beauty

from the water. For many participants, paddling through the winding channels at high tide—surrounded by dense root systems and abundant wildlife—has been a deeply moving and memorable experience.

Ecologically, the mangroves continue to demonstrate their importance as nursery habitats for marine life. Mangrove forests provide shelter for juvenile fish, rays, and sharks, offering protection from predators and a rich feeding environment during their most vulnerable life stages. In 2025, exploration of a previously unmonitored section of the mangrove revealed consistent sightings of baby blacktip reef sharks over the course of a month. The shallow waters and complex root structures create ideal refuge from larger reef predators such as adult sharks and groupers, highlighting the mangrove's role as a critical early-life habitat.



**276** guests joined  
Hithadhoo Mangrove Tours



**\$2,660** contributed to local  
council through kayak rental







These observations are now being incorporated into ongoing monitoring efforts, with the potential to inform future management and protection strategies for the area. As data builds over time, it may help guide adaptive management decisions that further strengthen the conservation value of this MPA.

Beyond its ecological significance, the success of the Hithadhoo mangrove kayaking programme reflects a strong sense of community ownership. By offering an alternative, non-extractive livelihood, the initiative supports local income while reinforcing the value of preserving natural ecosystems. It also serves as an important platform for environmental education, raising

awareness of the many benefits mangroves provide—from shoreline protection and biodiversity support to climate change mitigation through carbon storage.

Two years on, the Hithadhoo mangrove kayaking experience stands as a model for the future of sustainable tourism in the Maldives: one where communities lead, nature is protected, and visitors leave with a deeper connection to the ecosystems that sustain island life. For those visiting Laamu, we invite you to experience the mangroves at high tide—gliding quietly through this extraordinary habitat and witnessing firsthand why it is worth protecting.



# EARTH LAB ACTIVITIES

Throughout 2025, Earth Lab continued to serve as a hands-on space where creativity and sustainability come together, transforming everyday waste into tools for learning, storytelling, and engagement.

Creative upcycling played a central role this year. In October, hosts took part in an imaginative workshop that saw discarded and natural materials re-envisioned as handcrafted “fairy homes.” Using glass jars, wine corks, coconut shells, bark, cardboard, and moss, participants created miniature structures that celebrated resourcefulness while reinforcing the idea that materials often labelled as waste can still hold value. Beyond the workshop itself, the fairy homes are set to become permanent features around the resort—small moments of discovery that subtly communicate Earth Lab’s sustainability message to guests and hosts alike.

Circularity also extended beyond the resort through Earth Lab’s support of a glass-crushing initiative using glass collected from Maamendhoo. By sorting and crushing community-sourced glass into reusable cullet, the project ensured a challenging waste stream remained

in circulation. The processed glass is now available for practical reuse within operations and creative programmes, demonstrating how local waste can be responsibly repurposed while reducing reliance on virgin materials.

Earlier in the year, Earth Lab hosted another hands-on upcycling session focused on creating marine-life sculptures from reclaimed cardboard and paper. Team members explored techniques such as layering, reinforcement, and texturing to transform short-lived materials into durable, display-worthy forms. The resulting ocean-inspired sculptures now serve as visual prompts within Earth Lab, sparking conversation around waste reduction, creativity, and marine conservation.

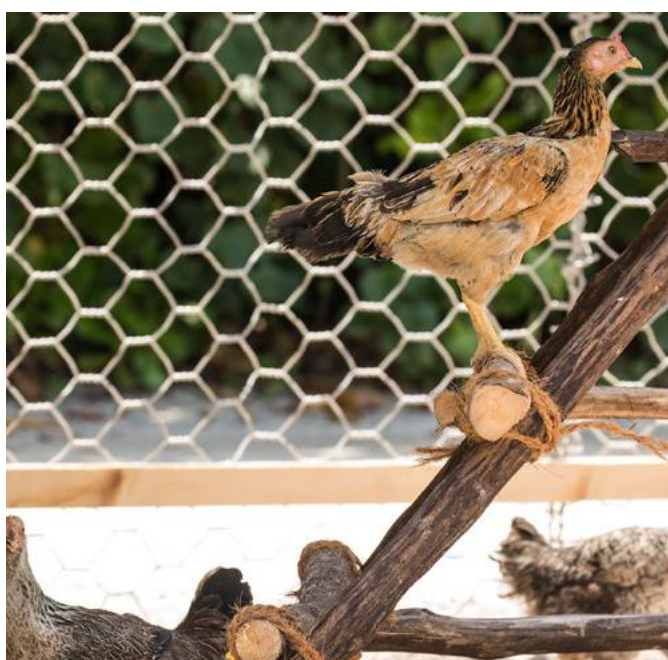
Together, these activities highlight Earth Lab’s role as a living example of circular thinking in action. By combining practical waste solutions with creative expression, Earth Lab continues to inspire new ways of seeing value in discarded materials—strengthening sustainability awareness while nurturing curiosity, skill-building, and innovation.



**208** guests joined  
Local Island Tours



**216** guests joined in  
Sustainability Tours



# A BIG THANK YOU

We would like to say a massive thank you to all our donors who supported MUI in 2025.

Guy & Sarah Jackson

Bruce & Lisa Warner

Corinne Nabholz

Robert de Laat

Ihsan Abu-Ghazaleh

Maiken Soerensen

Erin Quigley

Florence Schicker Hefti

Simon Freiherr Von Poschinger Bray

Julia Freifrau Von Poschinger Bray

James Kenny

This report and other MUI media would not be possible without the support of our media contributors. We would like to say thank you to those who contributed in 2025.

Owen Bornhorst

Jemma Paradise

Coco Ahmed

Harper Altschul

Mark Sharman

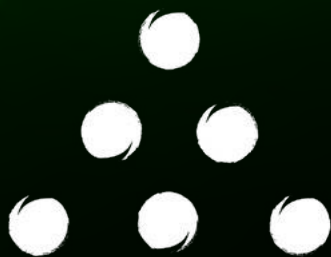
Erin Quigley

Alex Mustard

Steve Backshall



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