



MALDIVES WHALE SHARK RESEARCH PROGRAMME

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Contents

Page 3:	Foreword
Page 4:	1. Introduction and Objectives
Page 6:	2. Sites surveyed
Page 7:	3. The timeline of the study
Page 9:	4. Staff members during the reporting period (1 st Feb 2024 - 31 st Jan 2025)
Page 10:	5. Application of the methodologies
Page 16:	6. Results and discussions
Page 17:	6.1 <i>Distribution of whale sharks</i>
Page 19:	6.2 <i>Inter-atoll movements</i>
Page 20:	6.3 <i>New individuals</i>
Page 22:	6.4 <i>Sex and size distribution</i>
Page 24:	6.5 <i>Whale shark behaviour and encounter duration, South Ari Atoll</i>
Page 26:	6.6 <i>Injury</i>
Page 28:	6.7 <i>Visitation Numbers</i>
Page 31:	6.8 <i>Citizen Science Contributors</i>
Page 35:	6.9 <i>Most Encountered Individuals</i>
Page 38:	6.10 <i>Megafauna</i>
Page 41:	6.11 <i>Research Output Highlights</i>
Page 42:	6.12 <i>Other notes</i>
Page 44:	6.13 <i>Social Impact</i>
Page 45:	6.14 <i>Outreach</i>
Page 52:	7. Limitations and way forward
Page 53:	8. Conclusions
Page 54:	Acknowledgements
Page 56:	Resources

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Image credits throughout the report:

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Foreword from the MWSRP team

In 2024, MWSRP further embraced the power of collaboration, successfully expanded the team and provided multiple learning opportunities to aspiring Maldivian marine biologists. Heartfelt thanks goes to the communities and partners—both in the Maldives and around the globe—who supported us and continue to inspire and drive our mission to study and protect this remarkable and endangered species. We are deeply grateful to all who stand behind our efforts in research and conservation.

The MWSRP team



"The encouragement we receive from our diverse communities and peers—both in the Maldives and around the world—continually drives our passion and determination to push forward."

1.Introduction and Objectives

The whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) holds the title of the largest fish species in the world, growing to lengths exceeding 12 metres. The Maldives stands out in the Indian Ocean as a unique and exceptional habitat, supporting an year-round aggregation of whale sharks. This makes the archipelago an ideal setting for studying the species' biology, ecology and behaviour.

Despite these promising research opportunities, long-term scientific studies on whale sharks in the Maldives were virtually non-existent until the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme (MWSRP) began continuous research following a three-month pilot expedition in 2006. That initial project identified dozens of individual sharks, underscored the need for further research, conservation efforts, and public education, and ultimately laid the foundation for the establishment of MWSRP.

Since then, the Big Fish Network (MWSRP's very own citizen science platform) has documented over 8,000 whale shark sightings, with the earliest recorded encounter dating back to 1996. The Maldives continues to offer immense potential for future research, particularly on key topics such as spatial distribution, migratory patterns, and diving behaviour.

MWSRP's research into the characteristics and movements of whale sharks in Maldivian waters provides the scientific basis for its role as a grassroots conservation charity. The Programme serves as a trusted resource for government bodies, the tourism industry and local communities. Since 2006, MWSRP has conducted school education sessions, organised field trips, facilitated international cultural exchanges for local youth, and led Big Fish Network engagement activities. Over the years, the Programme has maintained close collaboration with industry stakeholders, fishers, and local island councils—successfully fostering partnerships among resorts, local islands, and liveaboards to promote sustainable conservation.



Key achievements to date include the government's adoption of whale shark encounter guidelines, developed by MWSRP during stakeholder consultations, for use by tour operators. Another milestone came in 2009 with the official designation of the Maldives' largest Marine Protected Area (MPA), covering 42 km². This area, the South Ari Atoll Marine Protected Area (SAMPA), encompasses the country's primary whale shark aggregation site. MWSRP continues to support the government by enhancing the management capacity of local stakeholders and island communities operating within the MPA.

Furthermore, MWSRP has also been actively involved in working with the government and other stakeholders to amend the Protected Species Regulations, further strengthening the legal framework for whale shark conservation.

In the year 2024, a key achievement was our contribution to the designation of ISRAs (Important Shark and Ray Aggregation Areas) for IUCN. *"ISRAs are "discrete, three-dimensional portions of habitat, important for one or more shark species, that are delineated and have the potential to be managed for conservation". The ISRAs' main purpose is to attract the attention of policymakers- and decision-makers on the need to maintain the favourable conservation status of sharks in that specific area through the implementation of the most appropriate management measures, and this can include an MPA designation."*

Our mission is to advance whale shark research and support effective conservation policies in the Maldives. Working in collaboration with local communities and industry stakeholders, we use scientific research to protect the Maldives' rich biodiversity and fragile marine ecosystems—vital not only for whale sharks but also for the livelihoods and cultural heritage of Maldivians.

2. Sites surveyed

Unless otherwise noted, the data included in this report provides an overview of the last 12 months (February 2024 - February 2025). Please contact the MWSRP for additional information on past seasons or comprehensive knowledge of this species in the Maldives or other regions.

Throughout the research period, the Big Fish Network (BFN) in the Maldives documented 578 encounters with whale sharks. Of these, 35 encounters were logged by researchers from MWSRP, who also collected data on environmental factors. The rest of the encounters came from citizen scientists within the BFN, mainly from individuals involved in the tourism industry and conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Since 2018, contributions from the BFN have represented over half of the data within the Big Fish Network, owing to a rise in the number of contributors. During this reporting period, 94% of the data was provided by contributors, reflecting our increased investment in training programs and resources for guides who have joined the ranks of BFN contributors.



3. Timeline of the study

South Ari Atoll - Radisson Blu Resort Research Residency

Between the dates of 6th - 17th February and 3rd - 17th March, Chloe was based in Radisson Blu Resort, a property situated on the MPA, to conduct drone surveys from the island. These drone surveys will enable MWSRP and their research collaborator, Mareco, to create outputs which quantify disturbance and adherence to the code of conduct. No vessel-based survey was conducted during this time; only aerial surveys were conducted.

South Ari Atoll - MV Felicity Expeditions

Expeditions include 7.5 to 8 days of full survey, weather permitting. MWSRP log whale sharks, vessels and megafauna data encountered within SAMPA. A vessel is chartered for these expeditions and anchors outside of the MPA. The timeline of research based in South Ari atoll is listed below.

- 18th March - 28th March 2024
- 29th March - 8th April 2024
- 21st May - 31st May 2024
- 21st July - 31st July 2024
- 1st August - 11th August 2024
- 15th August - 25th August 2024
- 8th October - 18th October 2024
- 29th October - 8th November 2024
- 1st December - 11th December 2024
- 23rd December 2024 - 2nd January 2025

Fuvahmulah research residency

Between April to June, MWSRP staff member Iru spent time in Fuvahmulah to continue data collection on the seasonal whale shark aggregation as part of the ongoing collaborative trip with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme.

Further details and findings from these visits will be included in the subsequent sections of this report.

Baa Atoll

The team visited Baa Atoll at intervals throughout July to October 2024. Two team members were based in Dhonfanu, and during this time, the priority was outreach and engagement with the Dhonfanu community, council and school. Three staff members joined the Ocean Dimensions collaboration. During this time, a limited independent survey was carried out, as well as joined surveys where the staff joined on-going excursions and dives conducted by the property's third-party dive centre, Ocean Dimensions.

- Dhonfanu Island residency from the 7th to the 28th of August.
- Ocean Dimensions collaboration from the 6th to the 26th of September.

Further details and findings from these visits will be included in the subsequent sections of this report.



4. Team members during the reporting period

Irthisham Zareer : Research and Outreach Officer

Iru oversaw the Fuvahmulah research season and part of the Baa Atoll research season. Also involved in the education activities, school sessions, grant application, staff training, reporting and stakeholder engagement.

Chloe Winn : Lead in-field Coordinator & Communications Manager

Chloe oversaw the majority of the South Ari based expeditions and also took part in a research residency period based at Radisson Blu Resort. Her role is multifaceted and also involved the training of two interns Ziyen and Zim as well as coordinating the Baa atoll residency period together with Iru. Chloe fulfilled her role as Communications Manager creating online media and resources, virtual presentation sessions, reporting and stakeholder engagement.

Clara Canovas : Operations Manager

Assistance with MV Felicity Expeditions, including Big Fish Network citizen science contribution platform management, administration tasks, grant applications, staff training, and communication with stakeholders.

Mohammed Ziyen : Internship placement and later Assistant In-Field Staff

Internship placement and later Assistant In-Field Staff Member. Assistance with MV Felicity Expeditions, including Big Fish Network citizen science contribution platform, school sessions and other educational and outreach events.

Mariyam Zimam Athif : Internship placement and later Assistant In-Field Staff:

Assistance with MV Felicity Expeditions, including Big Fish Network citizen science contribution platform, school sessions and other educational and outreach events.

Ibrahim Shameel : MWSR President of the Maldives NGO

Richard Rees : Managing Director MWSRP - UK Charity

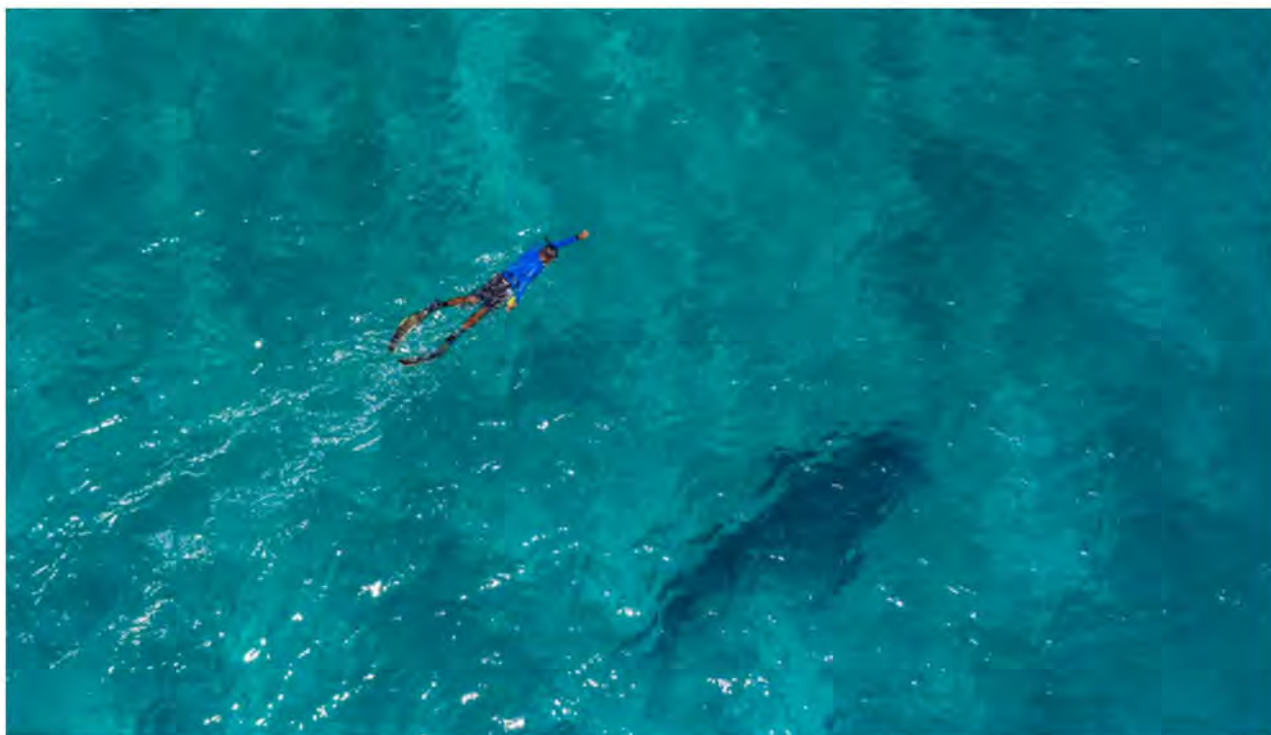
5. Application of the methodologies

To truly understand the behaviour, distribution, and well-being of whale sharks in the Maldives, we rely on a combination of tried-and-tested field techniques and collaborative, community-driven contributions. Our 2024 methodology focused on generating reliable and repeatable data across multiple atolls while building local capacity and fostering engagement.

Throughout the year, our research team conducted fieldwork in South Ari Atoll, Baa Atoll, and Fuvahmulah, each chosen for its ecological significance and unique patterns of whale shark activity.

- South Ari Atoll remained the focal point of our field research. Eight expeditions were carried out aboard MV Felicity, supported by trained participants and staff.
- In Baa Atoll, we collaborated with both local and resort-based dive centres to conduct boat-based surveys from August through to September.
- Fuvahmulah was surveyed in April as part of a joint effort with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme.

The timing of each expedition was chosen to align with seasonal whale shark activity, with many surveys designed to coincide with peak periods of tourism and plankton blooms.



In-Field Data Collection Techniques

During expeditions, our team conducted systematic visual surveys from both the vessel's roof (to spot whale sharks and megafauna) and in the water during snorkel-based observations. Standardised protocols were followed across all sites to ensure consistency, and survey effort was entered daily into our database and cross-checked for quality and consistency.

For each whale shark encounter, we aimed to record:

- Photo-ID images (left-side spot patterns near the gills),
- Behavioural observations (cruising, feeding, evasive, inquisitive, interaction),
- Environmental data (visibility, depth, sea state),
- Injury documentation, where applicable,
- Estimated size and sex (where possible),
- GPS location and encounter time.

Drone data collection

The nature of much of MWSRP drone data collection is opportunistic. In previous years, all of the drone data was collected during the South Ari expeditions on board the survey dhoni, with collection happening on an ad-hoc basis. This is a secondary priority after a team member enters the water to get the photo ID data. It is also taken into consideration whether the shark is likely to stay for long enough at the surface to justify drone data collection.

Throughout 2024, we took a DJI Mini 2 model on our South Ari expedition surveys, but sighting data in South Ari during 2024 was particularly sparse from late April to July; therefore, we did not have a great deal of drone data collection during this time. The research residency period at the beginning of the year in Raddisson Blu Resort allowed for more consistent drone data collection, with three aerial surveys on average per day when weather permitted.

Plankton Ecotoxicology data collection

This study was launched in September 2024, and the nature of plankton collection for this study is opportunistic. Plankton is collected with a plankton net as and when a whale shark is sighted feeding in the area. The net is lowered to a depth of 10 metres, and on average, 10 - 15 pulls are made with the net to achieve a sample with sufficient biomass for analysing for contaminants.

Citizen Science: The Big Fish Network

An essential part of our work is the Big Fish Network (BFN) — a growing community of guides, dive centres, NGOs, and visitors who report whale shark sightings across the Maldives. In 2024, over 94% of sightings were submitted by BFN contributors.

We provided training sessions and digital resources to equip contributors with:

- The knowledge to take clear identification photographs,
- An understanding of responsible encounter guidelines,
- Instructions for logging accurate GPS, size measurements, and behaviour data.

All submitted data went through a verification process before they were added to the Big Fish Network.

Megafauna & Vessel Traffic Monitoring

In addition to whale shark surveys, our methodology included incidentally recording other marine megafauna such as manta rays, dolphins, and turtles. This provided valuable ecosystem context. We also tracked vessel presence and behaviour the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).

Observations included:

- Number of vessels per encounter
- Approximate speed
- Adherence to code-of-conduct guidelines.

This helped link human activity trends to the condition and behaviour of whale sharks in the area.

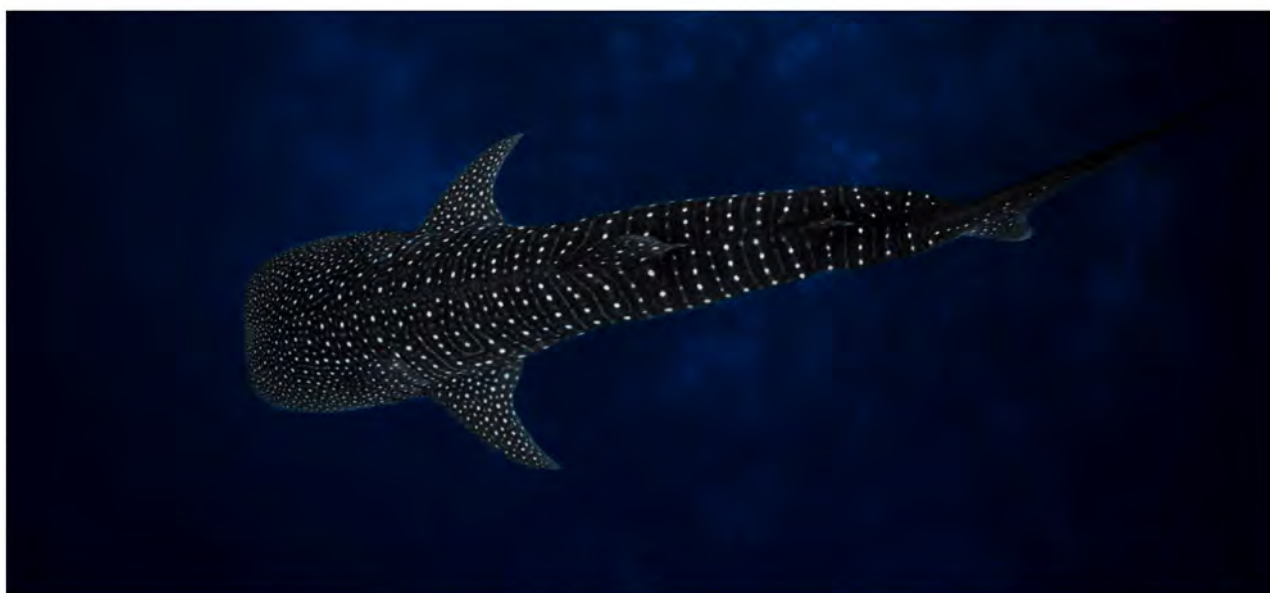
Educational Expeditions and Internships

In 2024, we also integrated capacity-building through:

- Internship programmes, which supported young individuals in developing skills in photo-ID, data entry, and field work.
- Ongoing collaboration with guides, divers, and snorkelers to engage guests in awareness-building and to promote respectful, responsible interactions with marine ecosystems.
- Deliver presentations to tourists designed to support ethical wildlife viewing practices and foster a shared commitment to marine conservation.

MWSRP South Ari Expeditions

In 2024, we hosted more than 70 enthusiastic participants from diverse countries—including the Maldives, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, Spain, Brazil, Russia, Estonia, the USA, and France—across nine expeditions. They joined us to learn about whale shark research and conservation, while actively assisting with daily data collection during transects throughout SAMPA. Participants were trained in data entry, environmental variable collection, observational data collection methods, and marine biology.



Baa atoll

In 2024, the team spent a total time of five weeks in Baa atoll, with the majority of time being based on the local island of B. Dhonfanu for a period of residency focusing on outreach in collaboration with the Dhonfanu council, Fehi Velaa guesthouse and Dhonfanu School. MWSRP staff members Chloe and Iru engaged with people of all ages from the island, hosting informative presentations and an exciting 'Plankton Party' on the beach, where the community came to gaze through the lens of the microscope to get a detailed look at the whale shark's plankton prey. During our time with Ocean Dimensions Dive Center (Kihaa Maldives Resort), MWSRP were able to focus more actively on in-situ data collection; however, access to an independent survey vessel was restricted as the designated vessel broke down, increasing demand for the remaining one in the property.



Fuvahmulah

In April, as well as parts of May and June 2024, we returned to Fuvahmulah to continue data collection on the seasonal whale shark aggregation as part of the ongoing collaborative trip with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme. During this period, independent boat and dive surveys were conducted, and presentations were delivered to local dive centres in Fuvahmulah.

Although individual surveys in 2024 did not yield any whale shark encounters, we continued to receive valuable citizen science submissions, particularly from deeper-water sightings. As such, the main focus shifted to increasing outreach and engagement with dive centres, as well as educational activities outlined in the outreach section. This year, approximately half of the time spent in Fuvahmulah was dedicated to outreach, and we consider this to have been a highly successful effort in that regard.



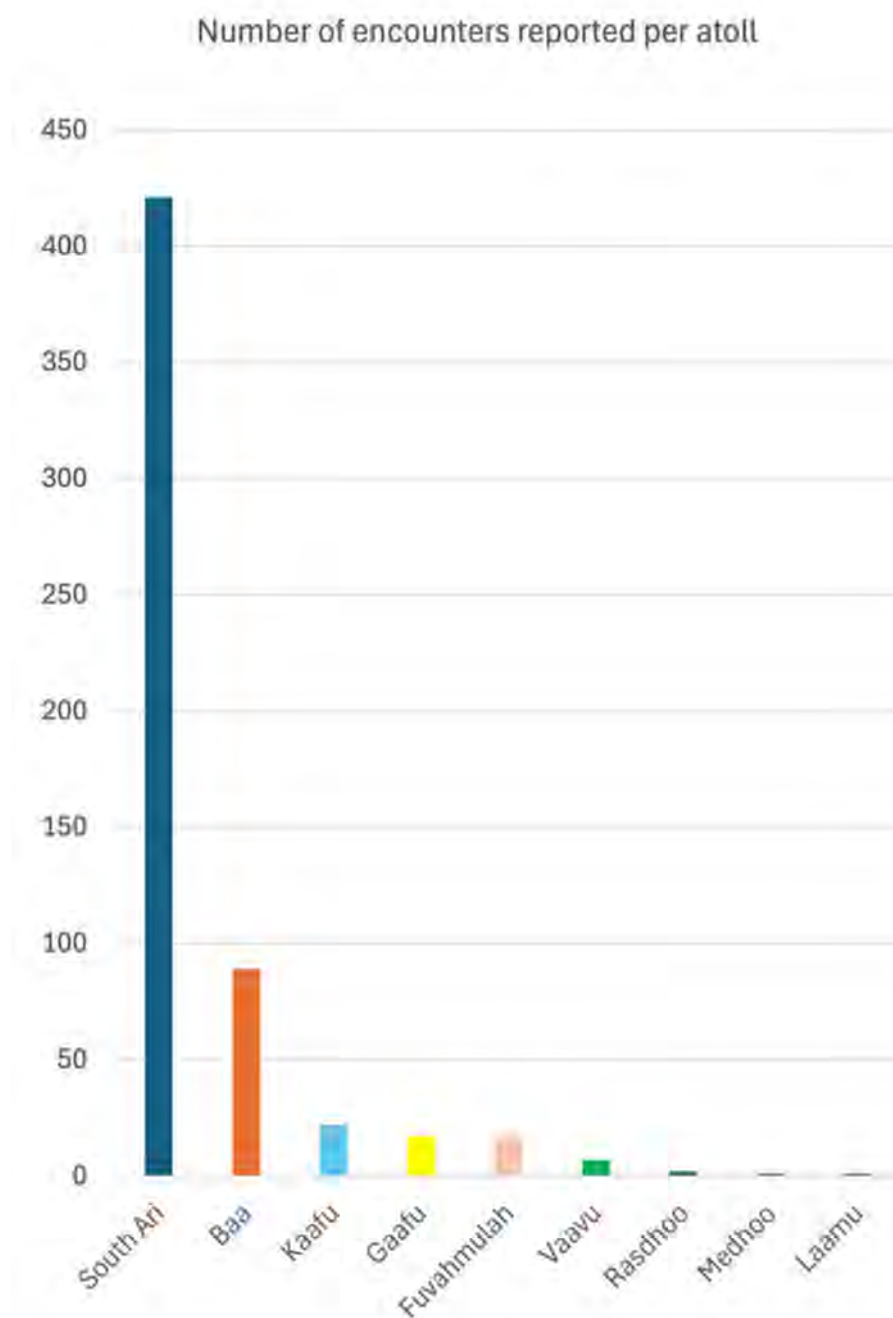
6.0 Results and discussions

- Between February 2024 and February 2025, 129 different individual whale sharks were sighted. Of these sharks, 53% had more than one encounter reported.
- 52 new sharks were added during the reporting period.
- 19 whale sharks from the database moved between atolls in 2024.
- South Ari Atoll was the atoll with the most reported new sharks.
- 45.5% of the encounters submitted from South Ari Atoll lasted 10 or less minutes.
- In 2024, the average estimated shark length based on all submitted estimates Big Fish Network (BFN) & MWSRP was 5.73 metres.
- To date, no individual whale shark recorded in the Maldives has been found anywhere else in the world.



6.1 Distribution of whale sharks

Consistently, South Ari records the highest number of reported encounters (**421**). Due to the year-round aggregation of whale sharks, South Ari remains the primary tourism hub where many operators conduct their activities and are based, leading to an increase in reported sightings. Most contributors to the Big Fish Network (BFN) are either residents of South Ari Atoll or frequent visitors. Our MV Felicity research expeditions, conducted throughout the year, are also focused on this area. Consequently, the majority of our research and outreach initiatives take place in South Ari Atoll. The MWSRP team was previously stationed long-term on the island of Dhigurah within South Ari Atoll.



Baa Atoll generally ranks second in the number of recorded whale shark interactions per atoll, with 89 sightings documented during this reporting period—figures that closely mirror those from last year. The South West monsoon season brings a surge of plankton, attracting filter-feeding species such as reef manta rays and whale sharks. Most encounters occur in Hanifaru Bay, where these animals take full advantage of the abundant plankton. Kaafu Atoll ranked third in recorded sightings, followed by Gaafu Atoll in fourth place, with Fuvahmulah coming fifth.

MWSRP has been actively engaged in outreach efforts in Fuvahmulah, collaborating with local communities and potential citizen scientists. All whale shark encounters reported during this period were contributed by citizen scientists. The sharks observed in Fuvahmulah tend to be more transient compared to those in other regions. While some individuals may return seasonally or annually, the probability of encountering the same whale shark in Fuvahmulah within the same season is relatively low compared to South Ari and Baa Atoll. This suggests that the whale sharks seen in Fuvahmulah are more likely passing through rather than residing in the area.



During this reporting period, Baa Atoll recorded 89 interactions, maintaining its position as the atoll with the second-highest number of sightings, comparable to last year's count (84).

6.2 Inter-atoll movements

Between February 2024 and February 2025, 19 individual whale sharks were recorded travelling across different atolls, a slight decrease from 21 the previous year. In 2023, nine of these sharks (highlighted in yellow) made inter-atoll movements, visiting both Baa Atoll and South Ari. From June to October, several sharks typically found in South Ari were also observed in Baa Atoll. This recurring pattern likely reflects seasonal changes in plankton availability and feeding opportunities, especially around Hanifaru Bay and nearby waters. No inter-atoll movements were recorded between the Central and Southern Atolls.

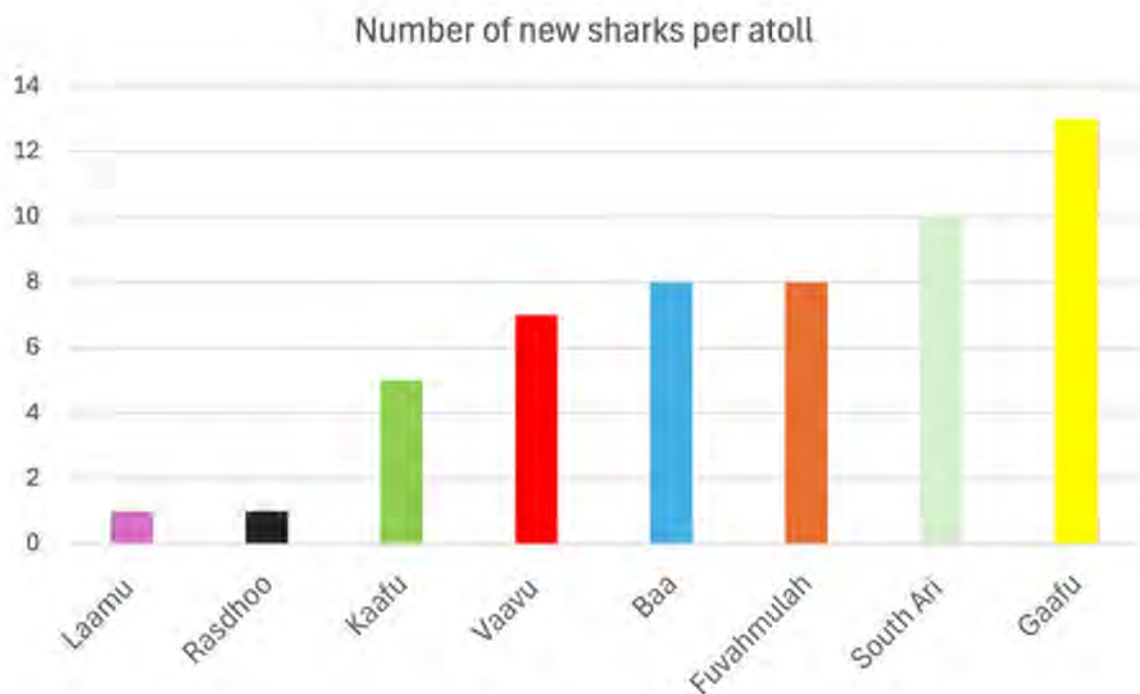
Of the 19 sharks, one is female, 12 are male, and the sex of 6 remains unknown.

		2024															2025
		February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January				
WS214	Vihdsaradhuni	South Ari				Baa	Baa			Rasdhoo							
WS268	Rattehi	South Ari						Baa	Rasdhoo		Kaafu						
WS286	Ameer H	South Ari			South Ari												
WS321	Gas			South Ari		South Ari		South Ari	Baa								
WS357	Meje	South Ari							Kaafu	Baa						Baa	
WS382	Mendhan	South Ari	South Ari		South Ari	South Ari	Kaafu	Kaafu		South Ari	South Ari						
WS440	Kahdhee									Kaafu	South Ari		South Ari			South Ari	
WS442	Avi	South Ari					Baa	Baa	Baa	Baa							
WS453	Dhonkanbulo			South Ari			Baa										
WS503	Kuday	South Ari										South Ari	South Ari				
WS505	Bajiya			South Ari				Baa	Baa	South Ari							
WS509	Dhonfuthu		Kaafu	South Ari				Baa									
WS569	Ubaidhulla	Kaafu	South Ari				Baa	Baa									
WS589	Maaz	South Ari	South Ari/Baa				Baa		Baa						South Ari		
WS654	Mariyambu			South Ari				Baa									
WS705	Vigani				South Ari			Baa								South Ari	
WS725	Alifuthu			South Ari				South Ari				South Ari					
WS737	Farukoi	South Ari		South Ari						Baa							
WS740	Alaa	South Ari					Baa					Baa					

19 individuals visited different atolls in 2024, and 9 of the individuals followed inter-atoll movements also in 2023.

6.3 New individuals

In recent years, the number of newly identified whale sharks—previously unrecorded and added to the ID database—has reached an all-time high. During this reporting period, 52 new individuals were added to the database. This increase is linked to the Big Fish Network’s expansion into other regions of the country, particularly the southern atolls, which are of significant scientific interest to MWSRP. Preliminary research suggests that whale sharks in the southern Maldives may display unique demographic characteristics and residency patterns compared to those found in other atolls. All new identifications have been contributed by citizen scientists. This is the first year that Gaafu Atoll has recorded the highest number of newly identified individuals.



36 Big Fish Network contributors (resorts, liveaboards, guesthouses, dive centres, and other conservation organizations) reported the new sharks. The MWSRP encountered no new sharks.

Contributors to Big Fish Network reported 100% of new shark sightings, demonstrating the value of citizen science.

We thank anyone who contributed new sharks to the Big Fish Network throughout the reporting period. A great majority of these contributors are guides but also guests of the respective mentioned operators:

Barceló Whale Lagoon, Baros Maldives Island Resort, Boutique Beach Dhigurah, Constance, Diamonds Thudufushi, Best Dives, Extreme Dive Maldives, Farih Rasheed (Ranger from Baa Atoll), Felicity Cruises (in collaboration with Secret Paradise), Fun Azul Fleet, Fuvahmulah Central Dive, Fuvahmulah Dive School, Fuvahmulah Scuba Club, Innahura Maldives Resort Dive and snorkel centre, Liquid Salt Divers, Maafushi Dive, Macana Maldives, Maldiviana, MarHe, Kuramathi Resort, Lluís Masuet Expeditions Liquid Salt Divers, LUX South Ari, Maafushi Dive, Macana Maldives, Maldiviana, Maldives Manta Conservation Programme, Miladhoo Maldives, Oceanic Nomad Divers, Oceanoholics Dhigurah, Ocean Fanatics, Olive Ridley Project, One and Only Reethi Rah, Princess Haseena, Kuredu Dive and Snorkel Center - Prodivers Maldives, Ritz Carlton Maldives, Pelagic Divers Fuvahmulah, Pullmaan Maldives, Scubashark Fuvahmulah, Scubaspa, Seaholics Maldives, Shamar Divers, Shark Island Dive, Tiger Shark Residence, Villa Park - Dive Oceanus.*



Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme

First sighted and named by

Mohamed Mizyan

Thank you for your contribution to the Big Fish Network and naming a new whale shark

**WS820
Gulshabina**

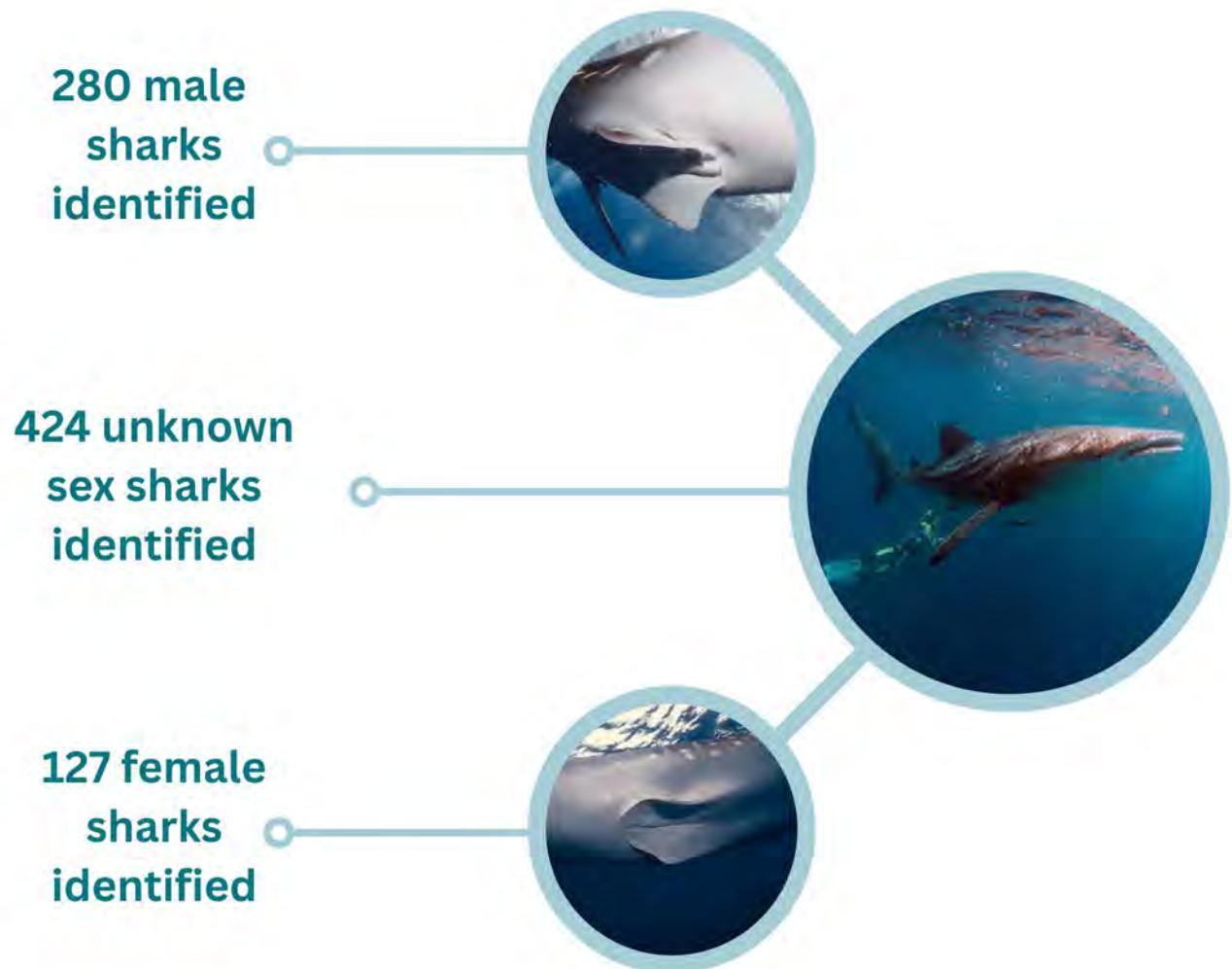
First seen 19th April 2025



6.4 Sex distribution and size

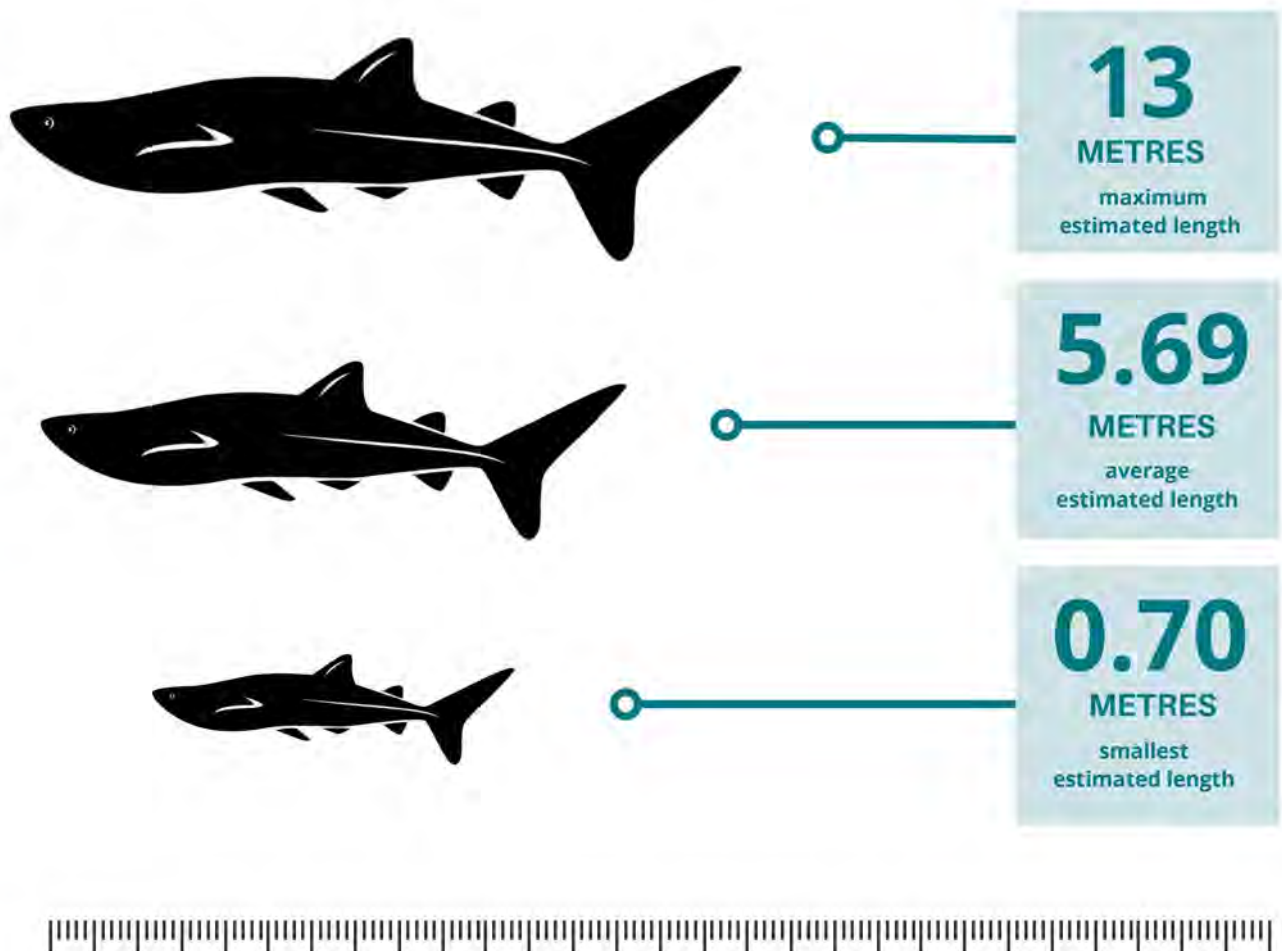
As of August 1st, 2025, the Big Fish Network (MWSRP and citizen science contributor encounters) contains 827 photo-identified whale shark individuals. The sex breakdown is 127 female sharks, 280 male, and 424 of unknown sex. Using data where gender has been identified, the male sex bias is 68.8%, supporting the long-held belief that the sub-population in this region primarily consists of sub-adult, immature males.

However, in Fuvahmulah, many of the reported encounters involve new female whale sharks.



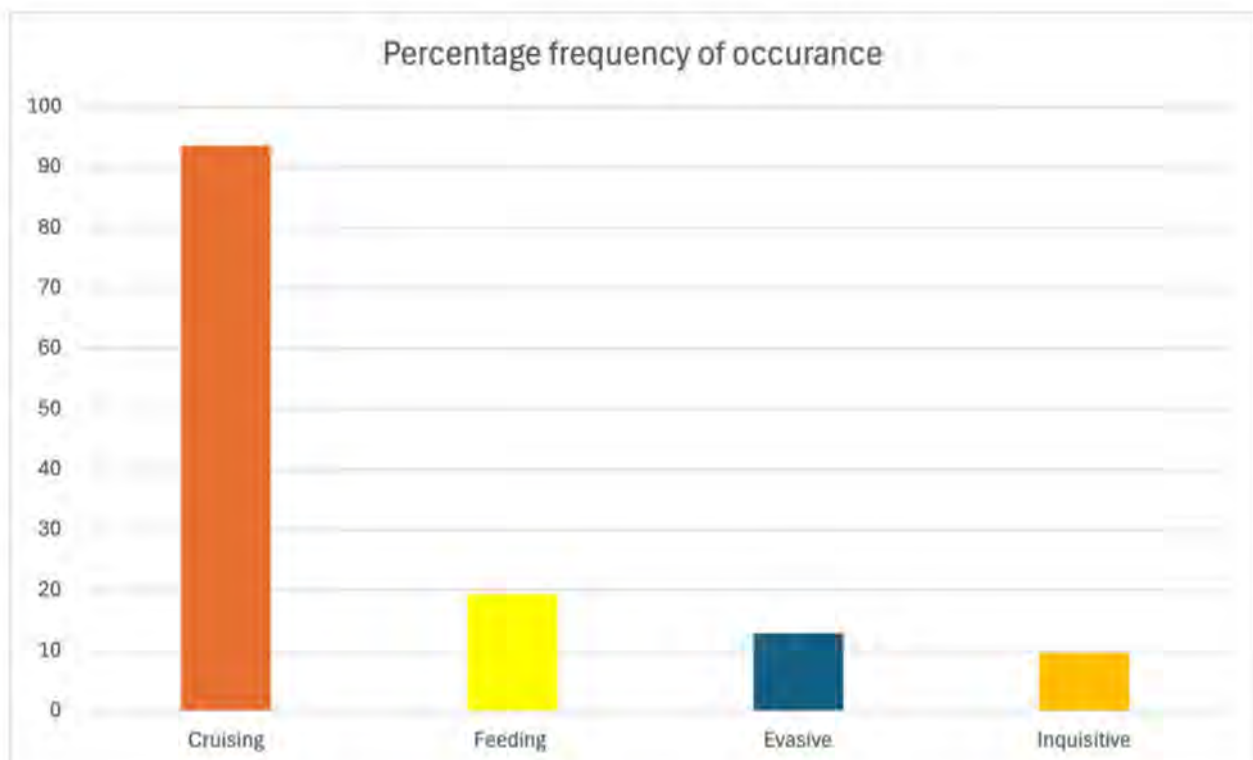
South Ari Atoll has the highest number of new female whale sharks, which coincides with the concentration of our research and whale shark tourism activities since 2006, when MWSRP began surveying the area's waters. The Big Fish Network data from Fuvahmulah has been received only since 2015, making it a more recent addition to our research.

The average total length of whale sharks is 5.70 meters. Most encounters in the database have occurred in the Central Atolls, where the average length has consistently ranged between 5.5 and 5.70 meters over the years. This year, the average lengths were 5.6 meters in South Ari Atoll and 5.5 meters in Baa Atoll.



6.5 Whale shark behaviour and encounter duration South Ari Atoll

MWSRP recorded 33 conduct and encounter time recordings during surveys from February 2024 to February 2025. In South Ari Marine Protected Area. The data presented in this chapter is based solely on MWSRP data, not citizen science data. 'Cruising' behaviour was the most commonly recorded behaviour during this time. Encounters attended by MWSRP had an average of 4-5 boats.



45.5%

of the encounters submitted for South Ari, lasted 10 minutes or less (including BFN Contributor data).

When sharks displayed only evasive behaviour, encounters were the shortest, lasting an average of 3.5 minutes and accounting for 18% of all observations. Feeding behaviour was comparatively rare, occurring in just 19.5% of encounters.

In regional comparisons, encounter durations at Fuvahmulah averaged 3 minutes, with sharks reported exclusively during scuba dives by contributors. This aligns with the hypothesis that sharks in Fuvahmulah are transient individuals, with few if any being re-sighted across dives.

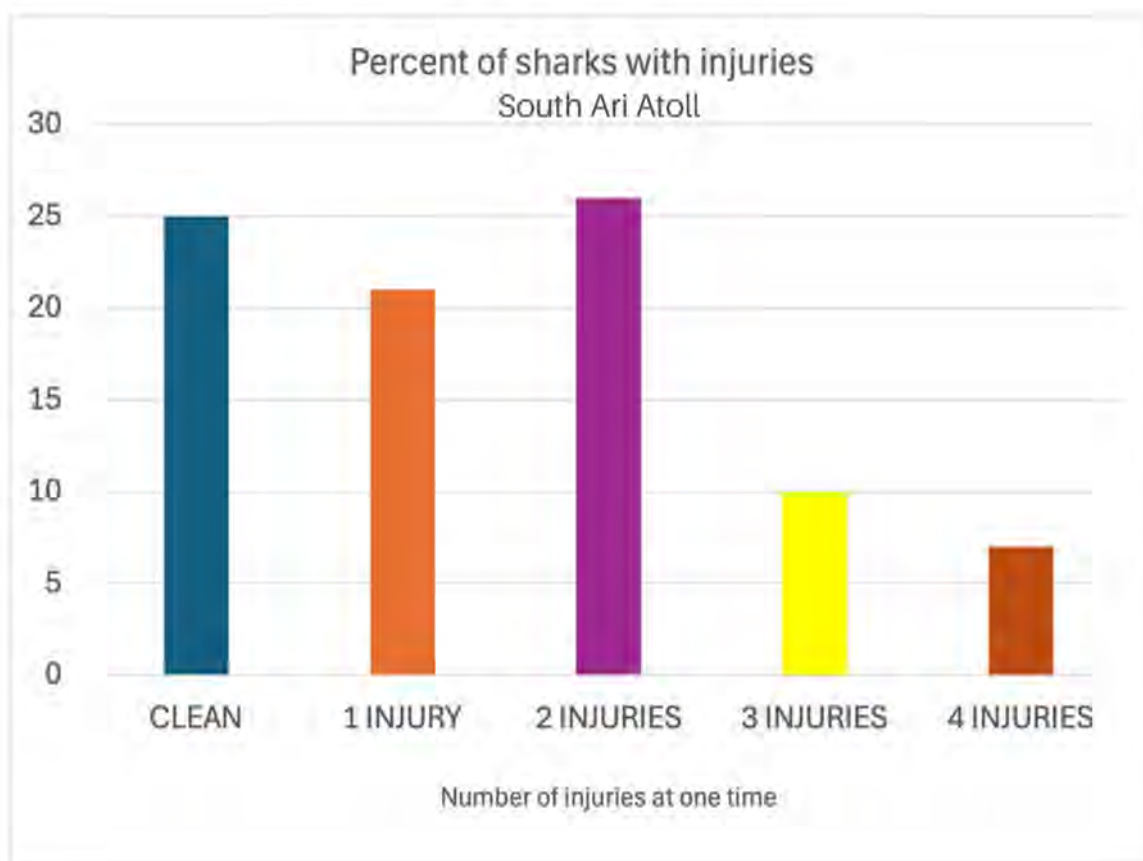


WS350 Hudhuveli displays inquisitive behaviour towards a snorkeler

6.6 Injury

During the reporting year, 70 identified individual whale sharks were observed in South Ari Atoll. Of these, 64.2% showed evidence of at least one injury, based on data from the Big Fish Network and MWSRP, compared to 57.6% in 2023.

Injuries were categorized as amputations, lacerations, abrasions, blunt trauma, or other types such as entanglement. Sharks without confirmed identification were excluded from the analysis. Notably, five sharks were documented with four major vessel-related injuries observed in a single encounter.



Between May and October 2024, 36 individual whale sharks were recorded in Baa Atoll (MWSRP and Big Fish Network data). Of these, 52.7% showed evidence of at least one injury. In Fuvahmulah, 9 identified sharks were sighted, 5 of which were reported to have injuries (Big Fish Network data).

In recent years, whale shark injuries, mostly caused by vessel strikes, have increased, with common wounds such as lacerations and amputations indicating collisions with fast-moving boats (over 10 knots). These repeated injuries may impact whale shark behaviour, health, and long-term survival.

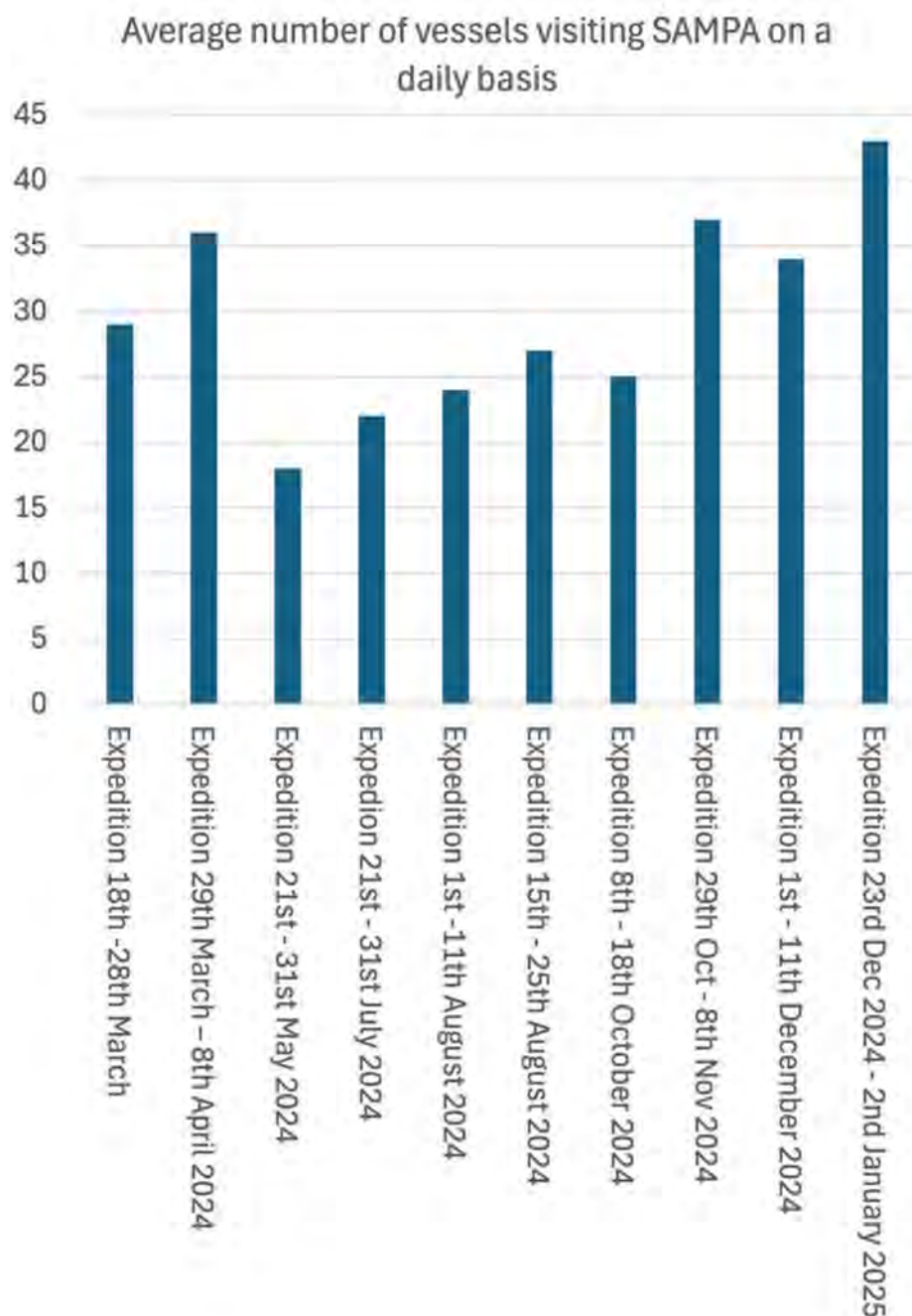
Injuries are becoming more frequent across the Maldives, especially in the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) and nearby regions. A new management strategy, led by the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy and EPA Maldives, aims to address these concerns. The Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme (MWSRP) stresses the importance of adhering to the 10-knot speed limit in SAMPA and maintaining a spotter on duty. Public contributions of whale shark injury photos are also vital for monitoring recovery and assessing population health.



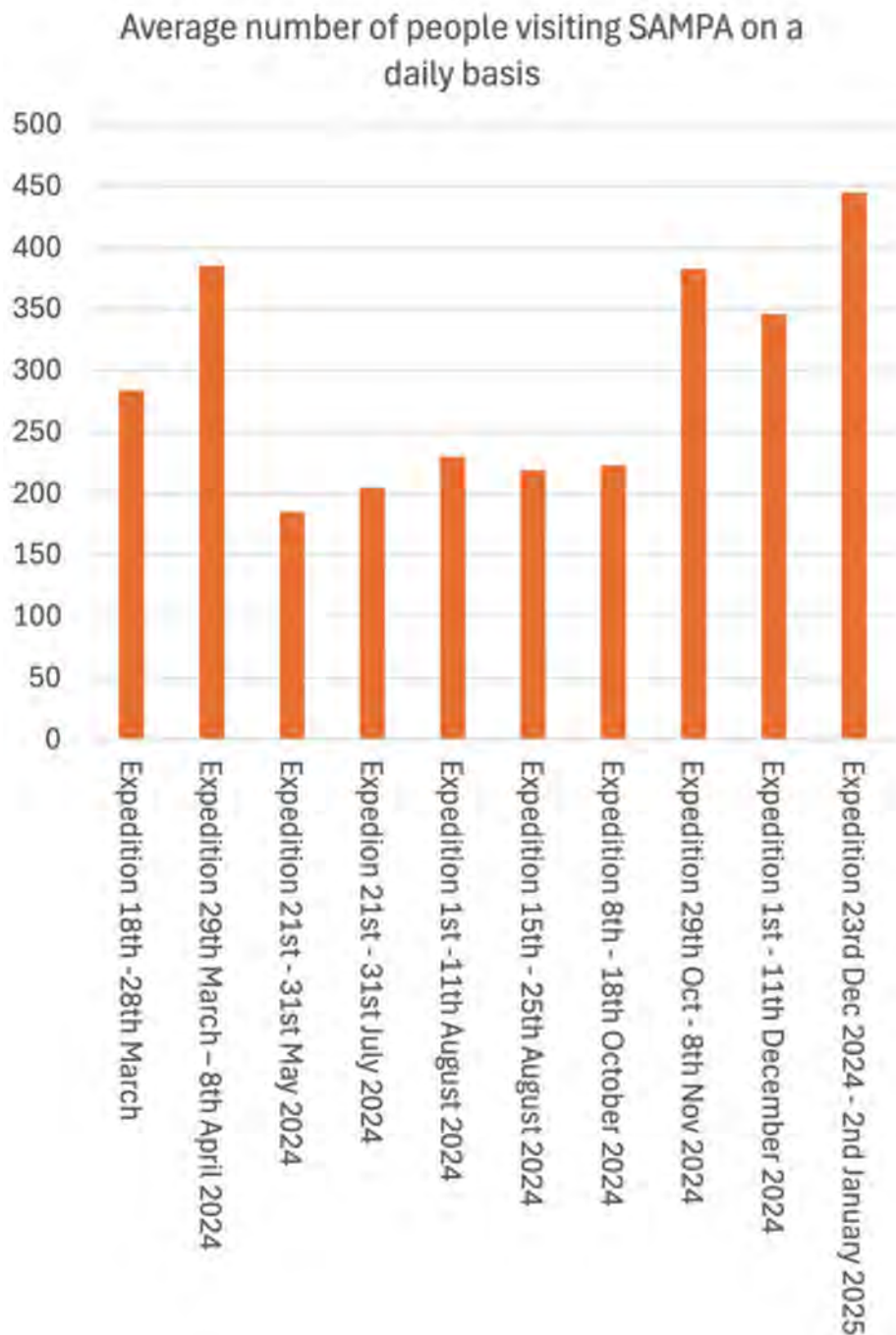
6.7 Visitation numbers

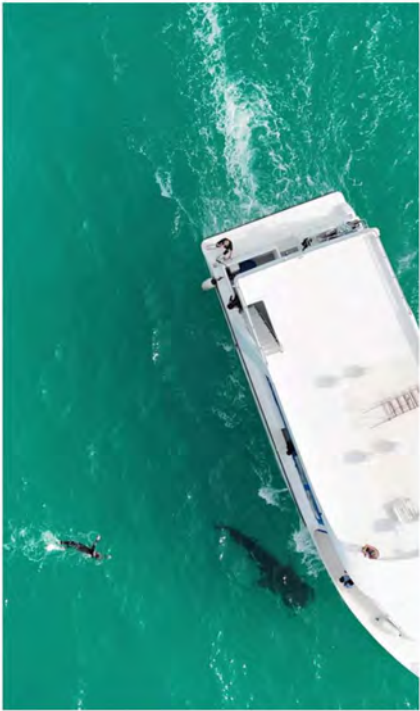
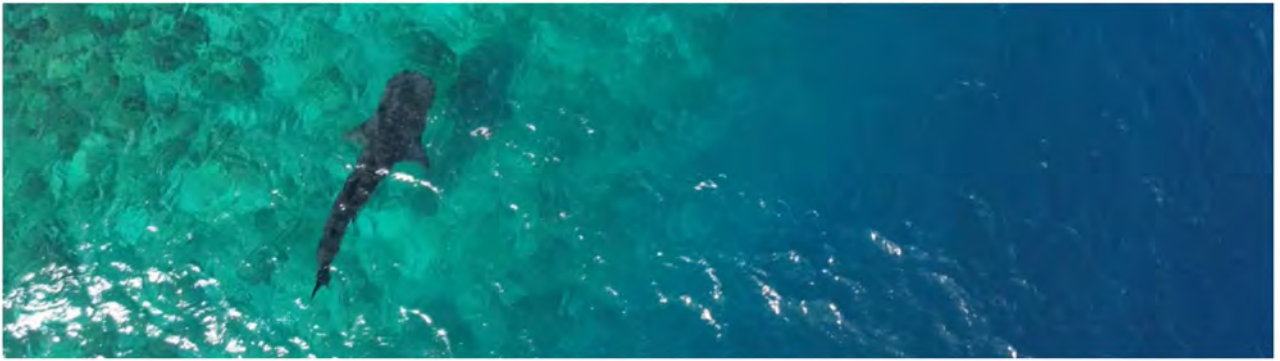
Daily vessel visitation to SAMPA peaked at 40 boats in one day, with an average of 38 people per vessel encounter and a maximum of 250 people recorded during a single encounter with one whale shark.

Long-term monitoring by MWSRP and citizen scientists indicates that both vessel numbers and visitors per vessel are increasing over time.



This growth in vessel activity coincides with a rise in whale shark injuries, with 52.2% of encounters involving five or more boats per whale shark. Such high congestion increases stress and the risk of collisions, and also reflects poorly managed tourism practices that can diminish visitor experience. If overcrowding and unsafe interactions persist, there is a risk that tourists will seek alternative destinations, undermining both conservation goals and the long-term sustainability of the local tourism economy.



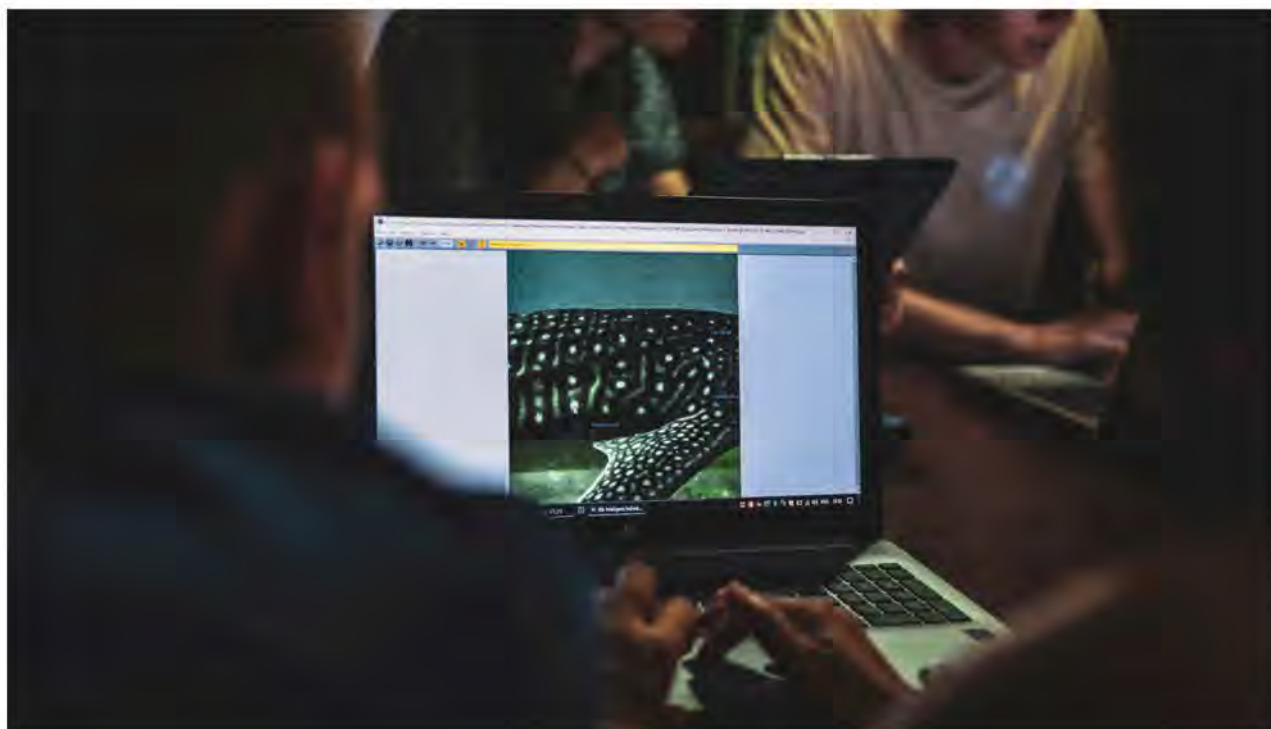


6.8 Citizen science contributors

The Big Fish Network (BFN), launched by the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme (MWSRP), is a citizen-science initiative that engages the public in whale shark monitoring and conservation. By involving local guides and interested individuals, MWSRP harnesses a community of people who frequently encounter whale sharks. Through training workshops, the MWSRP equips contributors with the skills to photo-identify individual sharks and raises awareness about conservation and marine stewardship. This approach not only supports whale shark protection but also empowers local communities to play an active role in preserving their marine environment.

A web-based platform for submitting sightings and photographs makes the data collection process more efficient, ensuring that valuable observations are quickly integrated into MWSRP's central database. This centralised system enables researchers to analyse whale shark behaviour, movement, and population trends, providing critical insights that inform conservation and management strategies.

In summary, the Big Fish Network is a strong example of how citizen science can enhance marine conservation efforts while fostering deeper public engagement with ocean biodiversity.



MWSRP has 231 registered individuals, organizations, or operators who share their sightings data with us. We welcome all new contributors who have recently joined our network (28). While some are still waiting for their first encounter with a shark, we thank those who have sighted a whale shark and shared their data. Below, we would like to commend the top contributors from each region. In 2024, MWSRP had 107 encounters, while BFN contributors provided information about 541 encounters.

Boutique Beach Dhigurah was the top contributor of the year. Thank you to everyone on the team.

The top three resort contributors during this period were;

- 1) Lux Maldives South Ari Atoll
- 2) Constance Moofushi
- 3) Villa Park - previously known as Sun Island

In addition to the aforementioned leading contributors, additional excursion teams from resorts within and outside South Ari Atoll shared their sightings during the reporting period.

This includes; Amilla Fushi, Bandos Maldives, Centara Best Dives, Conrad Maldives, Diamonds Thudufushi, Dive Velavaru, Fihalholi Island Resort, Joali Maldives, Kuramathi, Milaidhoo Island, Mirihi Ocean Pro Diving, Nakai Maayafushi Resort, Niyama Private Islands Maldives, Nova Maldives, Oaga/Hoara X, OBLU Ailafushi, Ocean Dimensions Kihaa, Ocean Fantatics Reethi Beach, One and Only Reethi Beach, Outrigger Maafushivaru, Radisson Blu Resort, Raffles Maldives Meradhoo Resort, Six Senses Laamu, Sun Siyam Iru Veli, Sun Shyam World Maldives, Vilamendhoo.



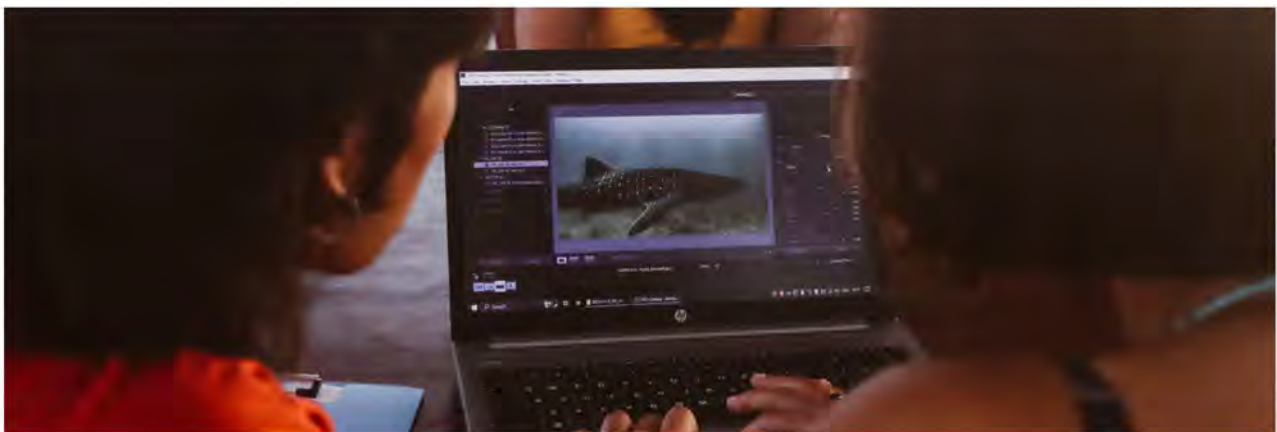
The top three local island dive centre/guesthouse contributors during this period were;

- 1) Boutique Beach
- 2) Liquid Salt Divers
- 3) Entre Azules

Other local island dive center/guesthouse contributors have also submitted encounters: Akiri Dhigurah, Astro Dive Thoddhoo, Big Blue Divers Rasdhoo, Bliss Dhigurah, Dharavandhoo Divers, Dhigurah Divers, Dive Squad, Extreme Dive Fuvahmulah, Fehi Velaa Dive, Fuvahmulah Central Dive, Hevana Holidays Keyodhoo, Island Break Maldives, Island Divers, Jimmy's Excursions, Joy Dive Maldives, Kamadhoo Inn, Kinaan Retreat, Kirulhiya Maldives, Little Sea Maldives, Maldives Fellas, Maldives Lovers, Mantastic Divers, Oceanic Nomad Divers, Oceanholic Divers, Raajje Divers, Scuba Divine Dhangethi, Sea Monkey, Shadow Palm, Shamar Divers, Tiger Shark Residence, Wee Diver.

The operators are based on islands across several Maldivian atolls, including Dhigurah and Omadhoo in Alif Dhaal Atoll; Thodhoo, Rasdhoo, and Ukulhas in Alif Alif Atoll (North Ari); Maafushi in Kaafu Atoll (South Malé Atoll); Dhonfanu, Kihadhoo, Kamadhoo, Dharavandhoo, and Maamigili in Baa Atoll; Keyodhoo, Fulidhoo, and Felidhoo in Vaavu Atoll; and Fuvahmulah, which is a unique one-island atoll known administratively as Gnaviyani Atoll.

Furthermore, thank you to the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme, which has also submitted whale shark encounters.



The top three liveaboard contributors during this period were;

- 1) White Wave Maldives
- 2) Maldiviana
- 3) Secret Paradise/Conte Max/ Emperor Divers

Other liveaboard operators which contributed to the Big Fish Network:

Adventure II, Blue Force Maldives, Carpe Diem, Dive Horizon 3, Dune Maldives, Maldives Legend, Scubaspa (Ying and Yang) and Kim Randall onboard Carpediem Fleet.



231

individuals, organisations or operators are enlisted to contribute their sightings information to MWSRP.

6.9 Most encountered individuals

WS337 Shaiban holds first place as the most sighted individual in 2024. Over 35 encounters were submitted during the reporting period 1st of February 2024 - 31st of January 2025. Shaiban has been in the top list of the three most sighted sharks since 2018. All of Shaiban's encounters during 2024 took place in South Ari Atoll, and a vast majority of these encounters took place in the South Ari Marine Protected Area.



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Shark profile - WS337 "Shaiban" seen 284 times



Sex

Male

First seen

26th October 2017 by MWSRP Volunteer at 3.465683, 72.820167

Length at first sighting

5m (est)

Last seen

3rd July 2025 by Outrigger Maafushivaru at 3.485701, 72.776738

Length at last sighting

5m (est)

Sightings per year

2025: 27, 2024: 35, 2023: 34, 2022: 36, 2021: 30, 2020: 31, 2019: 28, 2018: 58, 2017: 5

WS562 Muraka is the second most frequently sighted whale shark in 2024.



ApprovalContentReportsCommsSettings

Shark profile - WS562 "Muraka" seen 64 times



Sex

Male

First seen

22nd November 2021 by Sun Island Resort and Spa at 3.533825, 72.718859

Length at first sighting

5m (est)

Last seen

2nd February 2025 by Kuramathi at SA: South West Corner

Length at last sighting

8m (est)

Sightings per year

2025: 6, 2024: 24, 2023: 22, 2022: 11, 2021: 1

Mendhan, Kuda Kudey, and Fernando—typically among the top three ranked male sharks in recent years—did not maintain their usual positions this time. Fernando, although still the most sighted shark in the database since 2008, was only spotted five times during the current reporting period.

Taking third place is WS710 Abee, a female shark. This marks the first time a female has appeared in the top three most sighted sharks. We must consider that this shark also had a major injury last year. It has been sighted in both South Ari and Baa atolls.



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Shark profile - WS710 "Abee" seen 27 times



Sex	Female
First seen	2nd September 2023 by Royal Island Diveocenus at Baa atoll
Length at first sighting	3m (est)
Last seen	18th June 2024 by LUX* Maldives at 3.467575, 72.825981
Length at last sighting	5m (est)
Sightings per year	2024: 26, 2023: 1

The photographs below are from WS710 Abee, provided by LUX Maldives Team.

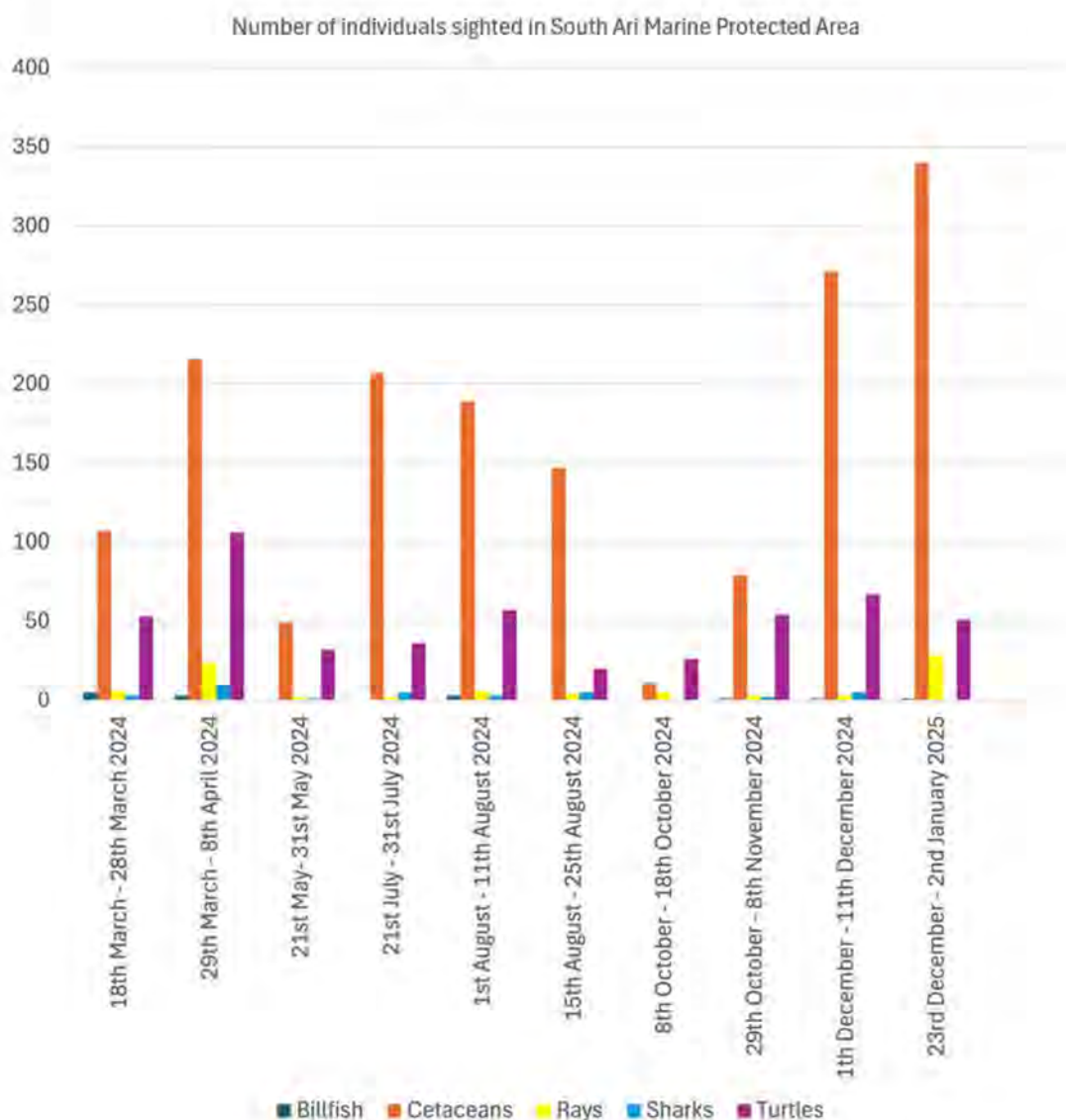


6.10 Megafauna

The MWSRP recorded incidental megafauna sightings during daily whale shark search transects in the South Ari Marine Protected Area. Search effort varied between expeditions depending on the number of Expedition assistants onboard, though there were always at least two people spotting from the roof.

The records in this section include only sightings made incidentally from the vessel's roof during general whale shark surveys conducted aboard MV Felicity Expeditions. Megafauna observed during snorkel stops or while entering the water with whale sharks are excluded. However, when identification photographs are taken—such as manta ray ventral images or facial scale patterns from turtles—these are shared with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme and the Olive Ridley Project, respectively, to support their conservation work.

On average, each expedition involved eight survey days. Some expeditions, such as those from 21st - 31st May 2024 and 15th - 25th August 2024, experienced reduced survey effort due to adverse weather conditions.



Spinner dolphins were the most frequently sighted dolphin species, with Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins observed second most often. Other cetacean species observed included melon-headed whales and pilot whales. Among turtles, hawksbill turtles are the most frequently sighted.

The incidental megafauna records are noteworthy, underscoring the importance of adhering to whale shark-specific regulations while also taking into account other species that utilise these waters for feeding, socialising, and breeding. We emphasise the importance of adhering to the established code of conduct and recommended procedures when encountering megafauna such as manta rays, turtles, cetaceans, and other shark species.



6.11 Research output highlights

- Exploratory Analysis on the Influence of Artificial Light on Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*) Encounters in Maldives.
 - MNU Bachelors of Marine Science student Hamdha Hussain Rasheed's final year project 2024
- An exploratory analysis of the injury impact on whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) abundance in the Maldives, South Ari Atoll Marine Protected Area.
 - University of Aberdeen, School of Biological Sciences - Olivia Tolley Thesis 2024/2025
- Only one percent of Important Shark and Ray Areas in the Western Indian Ocean are fully protected from fishing pressure (Cochran et al., unpublished).
 - In review for Ecology and Evolution 2025
- Prey abundance drives fine-scale seasonal movements of an endangered megafauna species (Carroll et al., unpublished).
 - In review for Scientific Reports 2025
- Identifying Priority Sites for Whale Shark Ship Collision Management Globally (Womersley et al., 2024).
 - Published in Science of the Total Environment

6.11.1 Conference Presentations

- **Theveli International Conference 2024**
 - Assessment of Tourism Business Operator Perception Towards Whale Shark Hotspot South Ari Marine Park (SAMPA) (Zareer, I.H., Cánovas, C. P., Harvey-Carroll, J.)

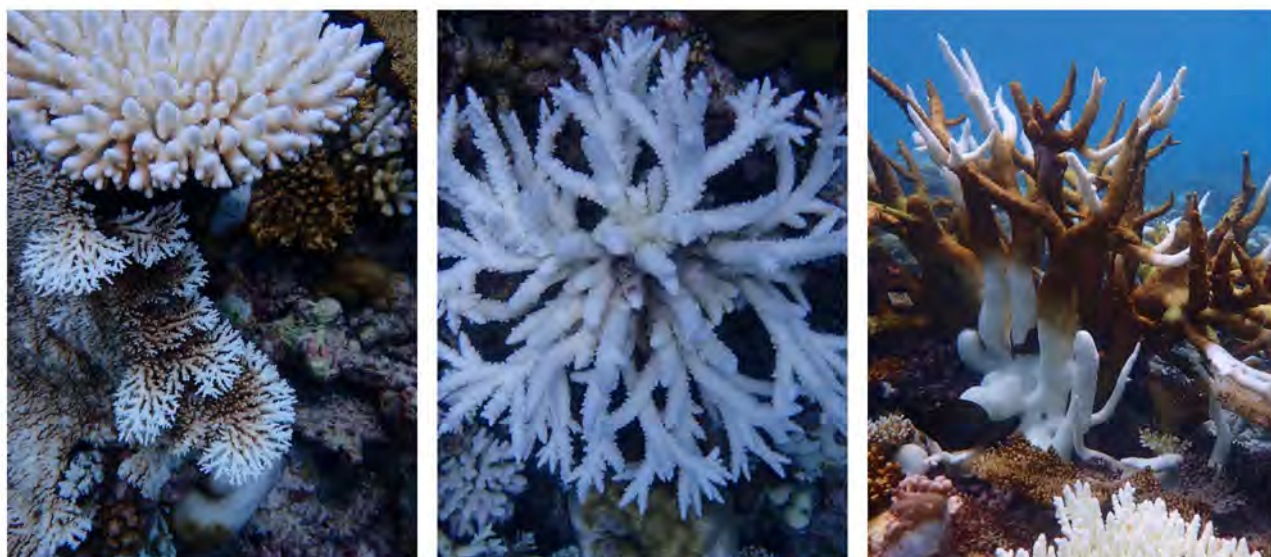
6.11.2 Ongoing Research

- Assessment of Tourism Business Operator Perception Towards Whale Shark Hotspot South Ari Marine Park (SAMPA) (Zareer, I.H., Cánovas, C. P., Harvey-Carroll, J., Manuscript in preparation)
- Insights into the Secret Lives of Whale Sharks in Fuvahmulah, Maldives. (Zareer, I.H., Cánovas, C. P., Ibrahim, A. Athif, M.Z. (Manuscript in preparation)
- Neonate whale sharks of the Maldives. (Winn, C., Athif, M.Z., Araujo, G. et al. (Manuscript in preparation)

6.12 Other notes

During 2024, a significant rise in sea surface temperatures was observed at the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPa), coinciding with a widespread coral bleaching event. This period of thermal stress, particularly evident during April and May, aligned with the global El Niño phenomenon, which is known to elevate ocean temperatures. As a result, coral communities in the Maldives exhibited clear signs of bleaching — a stress response where corals expel the symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae) that live within their tissues, leading to the loss of pigmentation and potentially resulting in coral mortality if conditions persist. The MWSRP team did notice some recovery over the weeks; however, there was noticeable coral mortality, and for instance, sites such as Rangaali Manta Point completely bleached and died.

In parallel, the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme (MWSRP) recorded a noticeable decline in whale shark sightings within the SAMPa region during the El Niño period. This trend is supported by encounter data collected throughout the year. It could be scientifically valuable to conduct a comparative analysis of historical bleaching events and whale shark sighting records to investigate whether a statistically significant correlation exists between thermal stress events and changes in whale shark presence in the region.



Dhigurah Beyru, SAMPa, May 2024

During the reporting year, MWSRP senior staff contributed feedback and input on multiple policy-related initiatives, including the Protected Species Amendment for the whale shark, the SAMPA Management Plan, and the Hanifaru Bay Management Plan. These efforts were carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Energy (now designated the Ministry of Tourism and Environment), the Environmental Protection Agency, the Biosphere Reserve Office, and JNCC.

Zim garnered a further understanding of the Hanifaru Bay Biosphere Reserve by undertaking the Hanifaru Bay guide exam. Meanwhile, staff member Iru was appointed to the SAMPA Advisory Committee, actively attending all associated meetings and workshops, and also providing input on the Farikede MPA Management Plan.

Additionally, MWSRP was invited to participate in the consultation process for the development of Codes of Conduct for interactions with predatory sharks in Fuvahmulah.

MWSRP also contributed to the latest edition of Fishes of the Maldives with updated statistics, further raising awareness of the work being done in the Maldives to better understand and protect this endangered species.

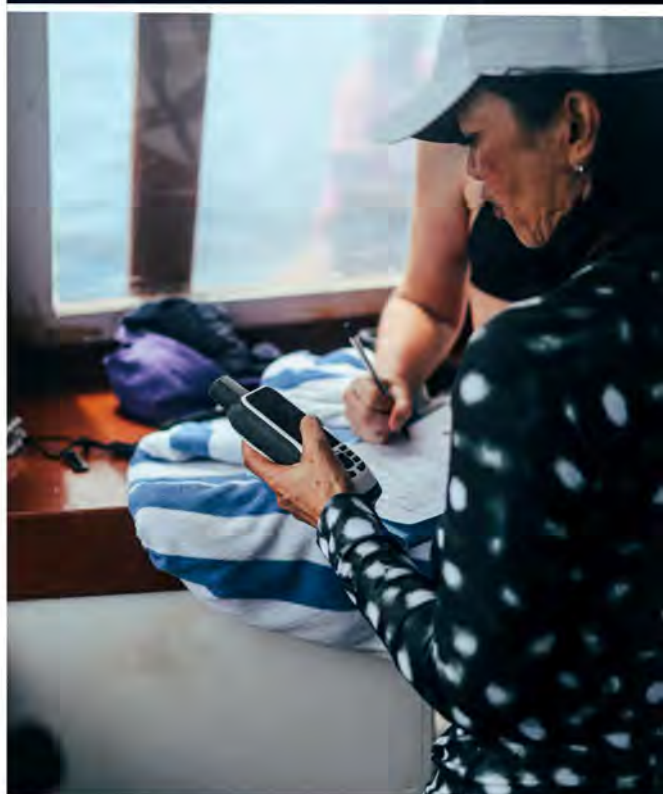


6.13 Social impact

As outlined in our mission statement, a core objective of the Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme (MWSRP) is to foster meaningful engagement with both community members and industry stakeholders. Whether interacting with enthusiastic ocean lovers or those new to marine life, we deeply value every opportunity to connect with the public. Conversations with individuals of all ages—sharing stories, answering questions, and discussing everything from whale sharks to their planktonic prey—continue to inspire and energize our team.

Looking back on 2024, one of the standout achievements has been the number and diversity of public events we participated in. We extend a heartfelt thank you to our dedicated in-field team, whose enthusiasm and commitment played a vital role in making these events impactful.

In addition to public outreach, we are particularly proud of the opportunities we've been able to offer young Maldivians this year. Despite being a relatively small NGO, MWSRP has made significant strides in empowering local youth through hands-on experience and engagement in marine conservation. This aspect of our work remains a key focus, and we are committed to expanding these opportunities in the years to come.



6.14 Outreach

Fenfushi School presentation

During our research residency period at Radisson Blu Resort, Chloe was invited to deliver a presentation on our work and whale sharks to the school pupils. She shared experiences from the field and received great questions from both pupils and teachers.

International Children's Day

MWSRP attended the event organised by Malé City Council and engaged with children and adults of all ages. Chloe presented a short ten-minute whale shark presentation for an excitable crowd of children who visited our stall for engaging games.

Ocean Night at Family Room

In celebration of World Ocean Day, MWSRP organised a public presentation in the much-loved venue of Family Room, Hulhumale. Approximately 35 members attended educational presentations given by local conservation and humanitarian NGOs.

Scuba Spa Love Whale Sharks Week

Chloe became part of the Scuba Spa team onboard, providing educational presentations for guests eager to learn about whale shark conservation and research.



Ocean Night

at Family Room café, Phase 2

5th June
8pm until 10:45pm

Join us for a night of educational presentations, from Maldives based NGOs, and excellent coffee in celebration of World Ocean Week and World Environment Day.



Prizes to be won in our themed quiz and raffle!



Engagement with South Ari island councils and local tourism operators

During the tourism business operator survey data collection process, MWSRP worked with island councils from South Ari Atoll. This collaboration also provided an opportunity to share updates on MWSRP activities and the current status of SAMPA. In 2024, this work involved the island councils of Fenfushi, Omadhoo, Maamigili, Kunburudhoo, and Mandhoo. This also provided an opportunity to actively engage with tourism operators who are key stakeholders in SAMPA and who generate substantial revenue through whale shark tourism

Engagement with South Ari atoll resorts

This year, we also focused on resort engagements and on strengthening networks within South Ari, with a focus on tailored guide training sessions and guest education. These activities not only enhanced awareness of whale shark tourism best practices but also strengthened collaborative relationships with key stakeholders, recognising their role as whale shark guardians and contributors to citizen science. Given the significant part these resorts play in the socio-economic fabric of South Ari Atoll and in supporting the sustainability of whale shark tourism, we greatly appreciate their willingness and support in accommodating us for these initiatives. Participating resorts included Barcelo, Nova, Constance Moofushi, Outrigger Maafushivaru, and Mirihi Island Resort.



Kerala Agricultural University, College of Climate Change and Environmental Sciences - Information Session

Delivered a virtual presentation session about whale sharks in the Maldives and the threats they face, as well as the implications of future climate change on the whale shark population.

Science Wonder Event at Begbroke Science Park - Oxford

While attending the Nekton Maldives Mission & MMRI Maldives Zooplankton Knowledge Exchange fellowship in Oxford, staff member Iru got to participate at a kids science themed event. Iru's focus was on engaging the visiting kids about whale sharks of the Maldives, while highlighting their connection to plankton and was run in parallel with Tonti - who focused on the zooplankton component.

'Moodhu Vaguthu' x MMCP for Fuvahmulah students

This extensive Marine Education Program was delivered to 18 Grade 9 Marine Science students from Gnaviyani Atoll Education Center, in collaboration with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme. The program included modules on marine megafauna, featuring talks from scientists based on the island, including those from Pelagic Divers Fuvahmulah and Fuvahmulah Dive School. It also covered marine habitats, with a field activity that included a seagrass workshop, as well as a Plankton ID workshop. The program concluded with a snorkeling activity on the reefs, providing students with hands-on experience of the local marine environment.



Educational presentation session for Gnaviyani Atoll Education Center

This session was also carried out in collaboration with MMCP, which included content related to biology, ecology, threats and research methods for whale sharks (delivered by MWSRP) and mantas (delivered by MMCP). 50 grade 8 students participated in the presentation session.

Fuvahmulah Shark night presentation at Ataraxis

Delivered a presentation to guests and guides on whale sharks, the work of MWSRP, and citizen science, as part of a presentation night focused on shark research and conservation activities on the island. The event attracted a diverse mix of locals and tourists, alongside local and visiting researchers.

SINC event

Chloe participated in the Small Island Nations Conference, which was hosted in collaboration with the Maldives Space Research Organisation (MSRO). The conference provided a valuable opportunity to gain deeper insights into the application of satellite technologies in marine research and connect with others about the work of MWSRP in a networking capacity. Discussions and presentations highlighted how such technologies can be effectively utilised for tracking marine species, monitoring environmental changes, and enhancing data collection in remote or logistically challenging regions — all of which are particularly relevant to the unique contexts of small island nations.



B. Dhonfanu island residency

MWSRP's time in Baa Atoll was largely spent participating in education and outreach. Chloe & Iru completed public presentations for all ages including an open community presentation delivered to 26 participants. The full Moodhu Kudhin school programme was delivered to 21 students. See our 'Baa atoll' section for further information. A big thank you to the Fehi Velaa Dive team and the council of B. Dhonfanu for your energy and enthusiasm for whale sharks and their plankton prey.

Maldives Marathon

MWSRP staff member Ziyan attended the Maldives Marathon to present MWSRP's work and engage with members of the public about whale sharks.

Presentation in celebration of International Whale Shark Day - The Standard Huruvalhi, Maldives - Raa Atoll.

Ahead of International Whale Shark Day, Clara delivered a presentation at The Standard Maldives in Raa Atoll, in collaboration with Carpe Diem Dive Center. The event highlighted the team's long-term work, emphasised the importance of guidelines and conservation, and also covered the role of citizen science.

Whale Shark Festival, Dhigurah

MWSRP were invited to take part in an event and workshop hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Energy (now designated the Ministry of Tourism and Environment) and the Environmental Protection Agency, Maldives, in #Dhigurah, which formally announced the new whale shark conservation guidelines and the SAMPA management plan. Staff member Iru presented preliminary results from her ongoing study, which aims to assess stakeholder perception of whale shark tourism in the area.



Women's Community Snorkel in celebration of International Whale Shark Day

As part of World Whale Shark Day celebrations, MWSRP hosted a Women's Snorkel event in collaboration with the Women's Development Committee of the Dhigurah Council. The event was generously supported by Nova Maldives. A key highlight of the event was that participants had the opportunity to encounter a whale shark, explore vibrant coral reefs, and see sea turtles during the snorkel



Lhaviyani Turtle Festival

MWSRP were invited to join the Atoll Marine Centre's second annual Lhaviyani Turtle Festival. Both Chloe and Zim joined for the productive panel sessions as well as the lively festival activities, engaging with members of the public of all ages about the whale shark. Chloe also delivered a short presentation to the audience about our findings.



Ocean Warriors presentation

Our team were given the opportunity to present to the public in Male at Ocean Warriors Kanduu Gathering event. The event proved to be a lively session with lots of questions and discussion.

Secret Paradise & Exodus cruises

Our long-term collaborators, Secret Paradise, hosted MWSRP staff members on board both the Exodus cruises and the Conservation Cruises exploring SAMPA. These trips aid our team by facilitating data collection efforts. MWSRP provided guest education to the participants who contributed to our team's citizen science efforts.



Internships & learning opportunities

Throughout the year, the team welcomed two interns to the programme: Zim and Ziyen. Both interns actively contributed to our survey and conservation work, gaining hands-on experience in scientific data collection and broadening their marine conservation skills. Since 2024, Zim has continued with us as an Assistant In-Field, while Ziyen has furthered his studies by enrolling in a Marine Biology course and becoming an engaged member of the UN Youth Movement. Ziyen is also preparing to attend COP25 in Brazil.

MWSRP welcomed several individuals to participate in conservation research and educational experiences, and we are grateful to Audha Ibrahim, Zarah Lasker, Maleeha Ibrahim, Minha Ismail, Ansam Waheed, Eyvah Zulaal Zaeem, and the SAMPA rangers for their enthusiasm and contributions during their time with us. Audha Ibrahim joined two expeditions, becoming a much-valued part of the team. She has since continued to grow in her career and is now working as an Assistant Marine Biologist.



‘Although I had experience working in the field, I had been focused on benthic studies, terrestrial surveys and other similar projects. One reason why working with MWSRP piqued my interest is because I had never worked with megafauna. Being able to be part of an NGO/Charity, doing research on an endangered species and giving back to our local community is an honour.’

Zim

Ziyen has since gone on to continue working on the ocean and advocate consistently for marine conservation and contribute whale shark encounter data. He has recently been selected to travel to Brazil for COP30 as part of the Maldives Youth COP initiative.

Ziyen



7.0 Limitations and way forward

As we reflect on 2024, we're incredibly proud of what the MWSRP team and our partners have achieved together. However, like any long-term conservation effort, we continue to face challenges and identify areas where we can improve.

One of our ongoing limitations is the uneven spread of data collection across the Maldives. South Ari Atoll remains our most thoroughly studied region, thanks to the regular presence of both researchers and tourism operators. In contrast, areas like the central and far southern atolls still lack consistent monitoring. This means there's so much we still don't fully understand about whale shark movements, behaviours, and populations in those parts of the country.

Another challenge is that we're no longer based full-time in South Ari. While this shift has helped us expand our efforts elsewhere, it does reduce our ability to track individual sharks over extended periods in a single location, something that's crucial for understanding patterns like injury healing or seasonal behaviour. We aim to resolve this in the year 2025 with the initiation of a long-term partnership with Radisson Blu Resort.

Citizen science continues to be a powerful part of our work, and we're genuinely grateful for every submission. However, data quality can vary depending on the experience levels, equipment used, and follow-up procedures. That's something we're actively working on improving with more training, feedback, and ongoing support for our contributors. The team is considering creating an incentive scheme whereby a prize is awarded to top regional contributors.

Finally, we're only just beginning to scratch the surface when it comes to understanding reproduction in whale sharks. The occasional sightings of neonates are fascinating, but also a reminder of how rare and fragile those encounters are. Throughout 2025, the MWSRP team will be working to gather more data regarding this and publish neonate sighting findings thus far.

8.0 Conclusions

Looking ahead, our mission remains clear: to protect these gentle giants by continuing to listen, learn, and act together. The data gathered this year represents more than just statistics, it showcases the power of cross-sector collaboration. With support from government agencies and partnerships with academic institutions, we have built a stronger, more inclusive foundation for conservation.

We are also mindful of the challenges that persist. The rise in vessel traffic and tourism in SAMPA highlights the urgent need for enforcement practices, increased public awareness, and stronger enforcement of safety measures. Addressing these issues demands coordinated action, and we remain dedicated to working closely with all relevant authorities to find effective solutions.

At the same time, the level of public involvement offers hope. From citizen science contributions to educational outreach and policy engagement, momentum for conservation is growing. Today's effective conservation depends on collaboration across sectors, communities, and stakeholders alike.

In 2025, we will maintain our focus on practical, data-driven strategies aligned with national conservation priorities. Our goals include strengthening partnerships, supporting evidence-based policy development, and ensuring that whale shark protection efforts continue to advance broader marine conservation objectives.



9.0 Acknowledgments

MWSRP extends its sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, along with the Environmental Protection Agency— especially Enas, Leevan and the ERC team—for their continued support of our work. We are also deeply thankful to the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources, and Agriculture, the Maldives Marine Research Institute, and the Maldives National University for their valuable collaboration.

Though SAMPA remains a conservation challenge, our team remain optimistic for the future of the area and are heartened to be at the beginning of a long relationship with the appointed South Ari atoll rangers, Ali, Shifal and Akuram. Our sincere thanks to the rangers who joined MWSRP on our research vessel to engage with our methods and review the team's observations of the area collected over recent years.

Special thanks go to the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve and its dedicated rangers for their guidance, patience and support during our operations in Baa. Thank you to Hussain and Dhalhey of Fehi Velaa Dive for your help over the Baa season and to the Dhonfanu Council and School. Dhonfanu's collective enthusiasm for whale sharks and their plankton prey was wonderful to share.

We are grateful to Secret Paradise Maldives, particularly Ruth and Kamey, as well as the Secret Paradise guides, Exodus Travels and the crew of the MV Felicity for their commitment and contributions to our efforts.

To the community of Dhigurah, its island council, and the wider South Ari Atoll, including the South Ari Atoll Council, thank you for your ongoing support, hospitality, and shared knowledge. We extend our gratitude to our long-time hosts, TME Retreats Maldives, for their logistical support, and to Island Divers for their cooperative work. We also appreciate the Dhigurah school principal and teachers for their time and engagement with our programs.

Our thanks extend to Fuvahmulah City Council and the local community for warmly supporting our collaborative expedition with the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme. Special thanks go to Aahil Ibrahim for his dedicated assistance with citizen science efforts.

Our appreciation also goes to SC Capital for supporting MWSRP's work. We thank Radisson Blu, especially for supporting the drone survey effort early in the year and for your ongoing support. Thanks to Constance Moofushi, LUX* South Ari Atoll Resort and Nova Resort for the diverse collaborations over the past year. A heartfelt thank you to Scuba Spa Maldives for inviting us to join two of their dive trips during the reporting period and for their longstanding partnership that has enabled us to share our expertise. We also extend our thanks to the Carpe Diem Dive Centre team and The Standard Maldives for inviting us to deliver sessions to their team and guests.

An exciting new partnership is also commencing with RIU, and we look forward to their support and the progress we will achieve together.

We are proud to work alongside fellow conservation organizations including the Maldives Manta Conservation Programme, Olive Ridley Project, IUCN, Miyaru, Save The Beach Maldives, and Maldives Resilient Reefs - Blue Marine Foundation - and Maldives Ocean Alliance. Your shared vision and collaboration are essential to turning conservation goals into reality.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the marine scientists and excursion guides operating across the Maldives—in resorts, guesthouses, dive centres, and liveboards—whose consistent support continues to drive our mission forward. Your submissions to the Big Fish Network are invaluable in helping research and protect this keystone species.

We would also like to acknowledge Pieter Brouwer for your voluntary support on whale shark IDs, as well as your much-appreciated donations to MWSRP. Thank you also to Ali Ibrahim, the Natucate team, Animondial, Viluxur and OV Traveller Club, Oevaali Art Shop, Thakethi, MoveMaldives, Shark Trust, In Shark We Trust, Apex Ocean Divers, Buona Vita UK, Parrotfish, and Indy Escapes.

We warmly thank the MWSRP expeditioners and interns (Master's and BSc students), visiting teachers, and school students who contribute their time and knowledge to us on the ground.

Lastly, we extend our sincere gratitude to our dedicated staff and the extended “family” branch of the programme, whose tireless efforts have ensured its continued success. You know who you are, and your support is deeply appreciated.

Resources

Human presence can disturb the natural behaviours of whale sharks, making it essential to follow guidelines that protect these behaviours vital to the species' survival. A code of conduct helps minimise human impact on their natural habitats, ensuring that these animals can thrive in a safe and sustainable environment.

MWSRP offers resources in seven languages—Dhivehi, Russian, Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. Whale shark guides in the Maldives regularly use these materials, which are freely available for public download. If you would like to receive a copy of the code of conduct packs, please feel free to contact us.



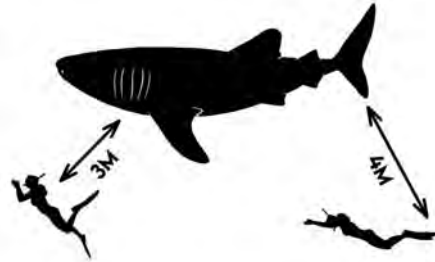
НЕ ПРЕПЯТСТВУЙТЕ:

Не будьте помехой на пути китовой акулы. Это вызывает стресс и провоцирует животное покинуть это место обитания.



保持距离

与鲸鲨身体保持3米距离，与尾巴间距4米



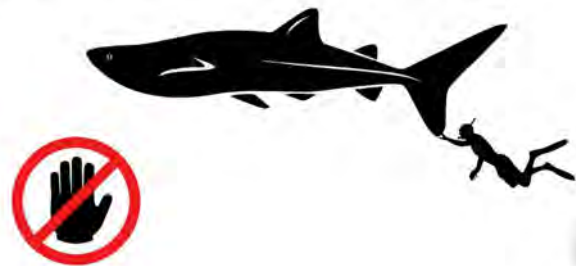
SCHWIMME NICHT DIREKT ÜBER DEM WALHAI

Lass genügend Platz, damit der Hai ungestört an die Wasseroberfläche kommen und den Prozess der Thermoregulation durchführen kann.



NO TOCAR

SI TOCAS AL TIBURON BALLENA ESTE SE SUMERGIRA A AGUAS MAS PROFUNDAS ANTES DE QUE SE HAYA RECUPERADO (PROCESO DE TERMORREGULACION)



LIMITER LE BRUIT



Ne pas crier ni faire trop d'éclaboussures



Entrez dans l'eau depuis une position assise lorsque vous quittez le bateau pour aller à leur rencontre



Ne pas sauter dans l'eau depuis une position debout

NON FARE FOTO CON FLASH

Gli squali balena non reagiscono bene alla luminosità o alle luci inaspettate dei flash.



Left to Right: Russian, Chinese, German, Spanish, French, Italian.

