

Mantas, Dolphins and Coral Reefs – A Maldives Cruise

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 16 February 2020



Whale Shark passing the boat



Titan Triggerfish



Honeycomb Moray



Reef Manta

Report & Images by Cathy Harlow



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Cathy Harlow (leader), Dr. Chas Anderson (Guide, cetacean and reef fish expert)
With 14 Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The stunning jewel-like atolls of the Maldives are a veritable oceanic paradise. Exploring their islands and colourful coral reefs in the company of cetacean expert and fish guru Chas Anderson, gave us a total immersion into the world of marine wonders both above and below the surface. On our 8-day cruise on board the comfortable MV Keana, we enjoyed twice-daily snorkels. We witnessed a spectacular and sometimes bewildering concentration of colourful, intriguing and at times downright bizarre fish in their coral reef homes. These were complemented by encounters with other beguiling reef inhabitants, among them Sharks, Turtles, Stingrays, Octopus, Squid, Lobsters, Sea Cucumbers, Sea Stars and the myriad colourful versions of coral.

An unexpected nocturnal visit from several majestic Whale Sharks gave us the opportunity to swim with them and observe these eight-metre long reef giants underwater, feeding on miniscule plankton. As if that weren't wondrous enough, the experience was repeated when Reef Mantas turned up for a plankton dinner later in the week.

Cruising from atoll to atoll gave us plenty of opportunities to look for whales and dolphins and we enjoyed memorable encounters with a Bryde's Whale, a large and very boisterous group of False Killer Whales, acrobatic Common Bottlenose Dolphins, Spotted Dolphins and Spinner Dolphins.

While birds were nowhere abundant, at sea we recorded Lesser Noddy, Brown Noddy, Great Crested, Lesser Crested, Black-naped and Saunders Terns and Tropical Shearwaters. On and around the islands we saw Asian Koel, Maldivian House Crow, Grey Heron, Striated Heron, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Crimson Rosella, Common Sandpiper and White-breasted Waterhen.

Day 1

Friday 7th February

Flight from Heathrow to Dubai

Some of the group met Cathy at Heathrow Airport's Terminal 3 at check-in. The afternoon flight to Dubai left a little late, but we made up time along the way.

Day 2

Saturday 8th February

Transfer in Dubai, arrival in the Maldives, overnight at Bandos Resort

On arrival at Dubai, we cleared security and went straight to the departure gate for our onward flight to Male, meeting others in the group who had flown from UK regional airports. As we began to descend through cloud towards Male, those in window seats were treated to glimpses of a scattering of jewel-like reefs and perfect little beach-fringed islands – welcome to the Maldives!

The queues at immigration were long but finally we were all through and collected our luggage. At the exit of the arrivals area, we met up with Cyndy, who had flown in on a different flight. It was a short walk to where the boat for our transfer to Bandos was moored in the most perfectly turquoise water imaginable. As we pulled away

from the mooring, we saw the high-rise new buildings of an artificial island suburb of Male, built to withstand rising sea levels. In 15 minutes we'd reached another world, the lush tropical island of Bandos, fringed by a coral reef and white sand beach. As we approached the jetty, a dozen Black-naped Terns were lined up on the harbour wall.

We were greeted with a welcome drink and a briefing about the facilities of the resort. Luckily some of the group were able to get access to their rooms straight away, while others couldn't resist the lure of swim while waiting for their rooms. At 4pm we gathered on the beach for a snorkel, and a chance to get familiar with the equipment as well as the reef inhabitants. Many of the more common reef fish were present, among them Sailfin Tang, Peacock Rock Cod, Greencheek Parrotfish, Picasso Triggerfish, Orange-striped Triggerfish, Six-barred Wrasse and Threadfin, Collared, Oval and Double Saddle Butterflyfishes. We watched Maldivian Anemonefish darting in and out of the tentacles of their host anemone, immune to the anemone's stinging cells. Their relationship is one of symbiotic mutualism, whereby both benefit.

Some of the group took a stroll along the shore, spotting Striated Heron, Grey Heron, Little Egret and Common Sandpiper while among the colourful tropical hotel grounds, Asian Koel could be heard and seen in the dense foliage along with Crimson Rosella. White-breasted Waterhens were seen foraging in the undergrowth, some accompanied by chicks. Common Spiny Lizards were abundant, scuttling over the leaf litter and darting up tree trunks. Fruit Bats were roosting in the trees near the hotel reception. Restless and chattering, some were fanning with their wings to cool down in the afternoon heat.

At 6.30pm we met up with Evi, Lorna and Wendy, who had enjoyed some extra days on Bandos before the tour. Over pre-dinner drinks Cathy did an introductory talk about the holiday on a terrace overlooking the sea at the Sea-Breeze Restaurant. Overhead, Fruit Bats were flying out from their roosts, heading across the sea to feed on neighbouring islands. We ordered individually from the extensive menu of mostly international dishes. After dinner, we made out the silhouettes of Black-tipped Reef Sharks swimming below us. Some of us walked along the wharf where a Smooth Flutemouth, Brassy Rudderfish, a Lobster and Bigfin Reef Squid could also be seen. Most of us were now ready for an early night to catch up on sleep.

Day 3

Sunday 9th February

Boarding MV Keana and start of our cruise

The day dawned clear and sunny and Pat, Caroline and Cyndy joined Cathy for a pre-breakfast snorkel along the reef bordering the beach. We were treated to a wonderful array of reef fish: Bluefin Jack, Small Spotted Dart, Sailfin Tang, Yellowbar, Round-headed, Bullethead and Bridled Parrotfish, Cleaner, Checkerboard, Yellowtail, Tripletail and Six-barred Wrasses, Orange-striped, Picasso and Titan Triggerfish, Moorish Idol and Peacock Rock Cod among the many species we observed. Pat and Cyndy got close views of Black-tipped Reef Sharks, which are curious but not aggressive to swimmers, Caroline spotted a Hawksbill Turtle and Cathy found a Crown of Thorns Sea Star, a predator of corals.

Meeting with others in the group for a fantastic spread on the breakfast buffet, we then had time to pack before checking out. At midday, Chas Anderson arrived with the Dhoni, a small Maldivian-style boat typically used for fishing and transport in the Maldives but also for diving and snorkelling trips. We transferred to the gleaming white MV Keana, our home for the next week, awaiting our arrival just offshore. We had time to settle into our

spacious and comfortable en-suite cabins before a briefing about the trip from Chas, followed by lunch. Line-caught Yellowfin Tuna is the Maldivian staple and made for a delicious lunch with salad, fresh vegetables and several mildly spiced curry accompaniments, followed by fresh fruit.

We set off in a southwards direction, with high spirits fuelling the anticipation and excitement of the adventure awaiting us over the week ahead. Just south of Male, in the open water separating it from South Male Atoll, Suzanne spotted our first dolphins of the trip, a group of around 30 Common Bottlenose Dolphins free-riding at the bows and stern of the boat. We enjoyed watching their antics, but after a while they headed off, disappearing as abruptly as they had arrived.

MV Keana has ample deck space on three levels, at the bows, stern and on port and starboard sides, offering a choice of locations to enjoy observing and photographing. The spacious top deck is the place for spotting, with comfortable seats under a shady canopy and a view over the ocean in all directions. From here we recorded a handful of Lesser Noddies on the surface, several Black-naped Terns in flight and a Lesser Crested Tern perched on a post.

Still heading south we passed several high-end resorts, sited on the many coral cays of South Male Atoll. Chas explained how ‘Atoll’ is a Dhivehi (the language of the Maldives) word, now adopted internationally. Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldives economy but the islands are leased and not owned by the resorts that mostly provide all-inclusive arrangements to visitors. However, in the last decade, some Maldivian island communities have been given permission to develop tourism for independent travellers looking for a different and more authentic experience of the island nation. We cruised past the village of Maafushi, where local guesthouses offer an alternative to the resort experience. Flying fish were torpedoing above the surface of the sea, disturbed by our passage – Chas explained how their family name *Exocoetidae* points to their flight capability, facilitated by broad, flat pectoral fins.

Late afternoon, we arrived at our anchorage for the night by the coral cay of Fiholhu. Marilyn elected to stay on board while the rest of us got ready for a snorkel in the shallows of the reef lagoon. This proved to be a rewarding spot and we found dozens of ‘new’ species: of note a Big Blue Octopus, observed by Caroline, which unlike others of the family, hunts during the day and has excellent camouflage skills. Octopuses have three hearts and blue blood, which is copper rather than iron based, allowing them to survive in the deep ocean. Sandy found a Long-barbel Goatfish and Honeycomb Grouper, and Helen and Mike, a Cushion Star.

There were simply so many spectacular animals to observe on this stretch of reef, among them Two-lined Monocle Bream, Indian Bannerfish, Chocolate-dip Chromis, Humbug and Indian Dascyllus and Meyer’s, Chevron, Black Pyramid and Very Long-nose Butterflyfishes. These laterally compressed emblematic yellow, black and white reef-dwellers often sport a dark band through the eye and a false eye spot near the tail to confuse predators. We found them jittery, darting at speed to safety in amongst the coral, which along with associated animals, is a main food source. Some Butterflyfish, we remarked, have incredibly long snouts for probing into crevices and extracting coral and associated organisms. Brilliant green Moon Wrasses were common here along with vividly coloured Bicolour and Dusky Parrotfishes. Lined Bristle-tooth Surgeonfish and Indian Triggerfish were less flashy. Others, like Four-saddle Grouper, Spot-tailed Sand Perch, White-tail Squirrelfish and Spotfin Squirrelfish are cryptic and blend in with their surroundings.

The same cannot be said for the swarms of small Orange Anthias, but their bright colour is only visible in shallow water as the colour red is absorbed by water in low light and fades and so they become blue or brown in deeper sea. A Black-spotted Sea Cucumber was admired by many, as was an orange and white Ceylon Nudibranch, spotted on the sea floor by Chas.

Back on board, we had time for a shower and some relaxation, before dinner and a chance to talk through and identify the species we'd seen, to record them on our species lists, an activity enjoyed by some, though not all of our group members!

Day 4

Monday 10th February

Fiholhu to South Ari Atoll

It was a sunny start to the day as we set off for a pre-breakfast reef snorkel, using the Dhoni. There was a flurry of excitement as we spotted a couple of Reef Mantas from the boat and we watched them briefly until they dived deeper out of sight. Once in the water, we snorkelled following the line of the reef edge. Caroline spotted a Giant Moray. Baring a mouthful of razor teeth, Morays look fierce but they are mostly taking in water and oxygen to breathe, rather than showing aggression. We saw some new species this morning: Klein's, Yellow-head, Citron and Meyer's Butterflyfishes and a very colourful Emperor Angelfish, Barred Goatfish, Spotted Unicornfish and Circular Batfish. There were several species of Surgeonfish and Triggerfish, including a flashy Clown Triggerfish. Another impressive fish was a Spotted Porcupinefish, which is covered with sharp spines and can inflate its body to look bigger, as an effective defence against predators.

Back on board Keana we tucked into a copious breakfast of Roshi (a kind of wrap) and tuna with shredded coconut and onion, a mild potato curry as well as eggs to order and toast and delicious jams and fruit. After breakfast, Chas, Cathy and some of the group were on the top deck spotting as we began to cross the open sea between the two chains of atolls. In more open water, the sea was distinctly choppy in a north-easterly wind, which dominates at this time of year. Soon we were surrounded by a large group of around 50 Common Bottlenose Dolphins, some leaping clear of the surface, while others took turns to ride the bow wave. There's nothing quite like dolphin antics to take your mind off the motion of the boat as we followed them with a chorus of 'wows'.

On the way to Ari Atoll, Cathy gave an introductory talk on some of the different types of reef fish, their physical features, feeding and behaviour. This was aimed at helping those new to Indo-Pacific marine life to sort through the bewildering numbers of fish we'd seen during the morning. We sailed past Omadhoo, a Maldivian island community, where fishing boats were lined up along a perfect beach fringed by coconut palms. Two local ladies were fishing from the pier, while a couple of Maldivian Crows circled around them, perhaps hoping for scraps. A Grey Heron flew past and landed in a tree and several Lesser Crested Terns were perched on some posts. By now we were in slightly calmer seas and made our way to Mirihi, our overnight anchorage in South Ari Atoll.

The afternoon's snorkel brought plenty of interesting species: Linckia Sea Star, Greenfish Sea Cucumber, Painted Spiny Lobster, Black-tipped Reef Shark, White-tipped Reef Shark and Nurse Shark, Giant Moray, Sailfin Tang, Powder-blue Surgeonfish, Scrawled Butterflyfish, Peacock Rock Cod, Triple-tail Wrasse and White-tail (Silverspot) Squirrelfish.

At nightfall, the crew turned on a spotlight at the rear of the boat while we gathered in the bar to listen to Chas's talk, an introduction to the Maldives and the experiences and wildlife we hoped to encounter. It's not everyday that a lecture is interrupted by a Whale Shark and Chas graciously abandoned his talk as we grabbed cameras and hurtled to the back of the boat. The spotlight had attracted great swarms of Silver Sprats and a plankton banquet for an eight-metre long Whale Shark. We watched entranced as time and again it surfaced, mouth agape to suck in the plankton soup. Though equipped with 3,000 tiny teeth, they are not used for feeding. Instead their gill-rakers, comb-like structures on the gills, trap and filter the Zooplankton. Each Whale Shark has a unique pattern of spots, which are used in photo-identification. South Ari Atoll is a well-known Whale Shark hot spot but even Chas and Keana's crew were wowed that one had actually come to visit us!

Encouraged by Chas and Cathy, several of our group got into the sea to observe the Whale Shark feeding underwater, which we could do without disturbing it by keeping our distance and holding onto the rope that secured the Dhoni to Keana. A little later, a second animal joined in and we watched the pair of them feeding. Then it was time to take a break for our dinner but those who stayed up later saw a further two Whale Sharks arrive to feed – obviously our plankton restaurant had a good reputation!

Day 5

Tuesday 11th February

Mirihi to Maghoodhoo on Faafu Atoll

After a somewhat windy night we awoke to a clear sunny morning with a stiff breeze. We took the Dhoni to nearby Rangali Madivaru, an offshore reef. By now we were starting to recognise some of the common reef inhabitants, among them flamboyant Lined Surgeonfish and banded Convict Surgeonfish, so named because of their 'striped pyjama' colouring. We also encountered small shoals of dainty Sergeant Major, Surge Damsel and Chocolate-dip Chromis. Some damsels are quite feisty and vigorously defend their coral head or algae patch territories, chasing away intruders, while others hang in shoals above the corals, catching plankton.

Predatory Giant Jacks were patrolling along the reef drop off, occasionally taking hunting forays into the shallower reef areas. Blotcheye Soldierfish were skulking under overhanging reef shelves, staying out of harm's way – their big eyes an indicator that they are largely active at night. Some of the group encountered more unusual species including fish predating Greasy and Blacktip Groupers, Starry Pufferfish, Wedge-tailed Triggerfish and a very flashy Clown Triggerfish, spotted by Cyndy.

Back on board, the chefs had prepared another copious spread for breakfast and we set off, heading south towards the open sea between South Ari and Faafu Atolls. We soon spotted a small group of Spinner Dolphins who surged towards our boat, then changed their mind and disappeared in a flash. Soon after, we encountered a larger group of around 15 Spotted and Spinner Dolphins, but again they chose not to stay with us – sadly that's nature for you! When it's windy enough that you can't tell a dolphin splash from a white cap, it also makes for challenging spotting.

Over lunch, we encountered our third dolphins of the day and it was clearly third time lucky. Around one hundred boisterous Spotted and Spinner Dolphins, were following a fishing boat in the throes of hauling in its catch of Yellow-fin Tuna. Thankfully in the Maldives, all tuna is line-caught, and being a major source of dolphin fatalities, purse-seine nets and gill nets are banned.

All around us there were dolphin leaps, spins and splashes, while others were vying for prime position under Keana's bows. Chas explained that Spinner Dolphins and Pan-tropical Spotted Dolphins sometimes travel and hunt together, but they can be told apart by differences in shape of the dorsal fin, which is more curved in Spotted Dolphins, who also have a white tip to the beak and a darker cape. Brown Noddies and Great Crested Terns were joining in the feeding frenzy, snatching some of the smaller fish being chased by the Yellowfin Tuna.

We enjoyed the company of these dolphins for a good 45 minutes before we said goodbye and continued our journey south. We arrived at our anchorage near Magoodhoo Island just before dusk. After anchoring, we went by Dhoni for a quick snorkel on what turned out to be a very productive reef. Oriental Sweetlips with their dark body stripes and yellow-spotted fins were playing shy under the reef overhangs, awaiting dusk before coming out to feed. Other timid players were a stunning Peacock Rock Cod, with its bright blue spots and several Sabre Squirrelfish. Flashing their bright colours were Kashmir Snapper, Orange-spine Unicornfish, Indian Bannerfish, Royal Angelfish, Dusky Parrotfish and Raccoon, Yellow-headed and Longnose Butterflyfishes.

Some of our group spotted a Nurse Shark, while Caroline noted a Common Lionfish and Giant Moray Eel and Sandy a Thicklip Wrasse. Wendy had a special swim with a Hawksbill Turtle and others in the group were also lucky to get good views of two other Hawksbill Turtles.

After dinner Chas gave an illustrated talk on coral reefs.

Day 6

Wednesday 12th February

Magoodhoo to Dhaalu Atoll

After tea and coffee, we boarded the Dhoni for an early morning trip ashore to Magoodhoo, a typical Maldivian island community. Splitting into groups of three and four, we walked through the village, whose streets, flanked by well-tended houses with small courtyard gardens, are laid out in a grid. We noted that the village had its own school, mosque, fishing port, inter-island ferry service, football pitch and a handful of shops selling basic supplies and groceries. There were mopeds and cycles, but few cars. Mothers walked their children to school, and we greeted a man hard at work planking a coconut palm trunk. In places the shoreline was composed of consolidated beach rock, where we noted Mottled Shore Crabs scuttling in and out of the sea and away from the tidal zone, we found Horned-eyed Land Ghost Crabs, looking like miniature aliens! At the port the inter-island ferry had just docked, and we saw sacks of vegetables, racks of bottled water and cement being unloaded. Looking in from the outside, life here seemed peaceful and largely uneventful and far removed from the high-rise city of Male.

Back on the Dhoni we got ready for a snorkel on the same reef we'd visited yesterday, where we found several new species: Indian Ocean Pin-striped Wrasse, Bird Wrasse, Yellowtail Blue Snapper and Yellow Boxfish. A Bi-colour Cleaner Wrasse was servicing a Long-barbel Goatfish, picking out parasites from its gills and even entering its mouth. Helen and Mike spotted a Black-fin Squirrelfish and John and Ruth a Smooth Flutemouth.

Back on board, we tucked into a welcome late breakfast, having worked up quite an appetite. Chas decided we should continue south along the west side of the Atoll, where the open ocean and deeper water would increase our chances of cetacean sightings. This was a good move as soon we spotted blows on the horizon when we entered the area of strong currents in the open sea between two atolls. After observing the blows and surface

profile several times Chas announced this to be a Bryde's Whale and in all likelihood, more than one individual. It looked like they were feeding in the nutrient rich sea stirred up by the current, although their erratic and unpredictable movements were not making it easy for us. We made several gentle approaches, eventually getting closer views of the blowhole and dorsal fin. Named after a Norwegian whaler, Bryde's Whales are found in tropical and subtropical oceans, and are one of the least studied baleen whales. Their taxonomy is under revision, meaning that there may be several species or subspecies.

After spending time observing the Bryde's Whales we continued cruising south until Chas announced that we were at just over two degrees of latitude from the Equator. Over lunch we observed Lesser Crested Terns, Saunders Terns, Tropical Shearwaters and Lesser Noddies feeding on small fish being chased by shoals of Yellowfin Tuna.

After lunch, we met with a group of around 40 exuberant False Killer Whales travelling at speed alongside our boat and staying with us for over an hour. False Killer Whales are large, robust members of the dolphin family, with males growing to 6m and females a little smaller. They are highly social animals and we witnessed them swimming in cluster formation close to one another, each sub-group probably consisting of closely related individuals. We looked down on them as they rode the bow wave and listened to their loud and vocal communication whistles. Some were partially leaping out of the water and then back-flopping with a huge splash. We noticed there were few calves, apparently due to a low birth rate of typically only one calf every six to seven years. False Killer Whales are found in tropical and warm temperate seas but are nowhere abundant and, as we learned from Chas, we were very lucky to have this memorable encounter.

Heading into the central area of Dhaalu Atoll, we anchored for the night and enjoyed another snorkel, which rewarded us with a White-tipped Reef Shark, Blotched Porcupinefish, Maldivian Anemonefish, Yellow-backed Fusilier, Black Pyramid Butterflyfish, Four Saddle Grouper and a large shoal of algae-grazing Powder-Blue Surgeonfish. Lorna spotted a Tripletail Wrasse.

Before dinner, we gathered on Keana's top deck where Chas began to reveal the secrets of a stunning starlit sky. But this was not to be – some minutes into his talk we were drenched by a tropical downpour and that was that! In the shelter of the bar, Chas instead told us the incredible survival tale of French navigator François Pyrard de Laval who was shipwrecked in the Maldives in 1601 and spent five years as an unwilling and sometimes ill-treated guest of the Maldivians, during which time he learned the Dhivehi language and recorded much detail of the islanders' customs.

Later that evening some of our group spotted an Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin feeding on fish attracted to the spotlight at the back of the boat.

Day 7

Thursday 13th February

Heading north to South Ari Atoll

After several very windy days, the forecast delivered on its promise of a calmer morning. We left our anchorage at 6.30 and some of the group joined Chas and Cathy spotting on the top deck in mellow early morning sunshine. Over breakfast, Pat, Kevin and Sandy saw a blow and dorsal fin towards the horizon. We slowed the

engine and circled the area for close to an hour, recording one further blow – perhaps this was the Bryde's Whales from yesterday?

After breakfast we continued cruising north and contrary to the forecast, the north-easterly breeze started up again with accompanying whitecaps. We saw Tuna jumping, a Brown Noddy in flight and Chas spotted a small group of dolphins but lost sight of them soon afterwards. At 11 o'clock, we reached an idyllic uninhabited coral cay fringed by coconut palms – time for a snorkel on the sheltered lee side! This was a spectacular reef, with beautiful Staghorn and Plate Corals, perhaps the most architecturally interesting underwater landscape we had seen so far. We were treated to many new fish species as well as some old favourites: Sailfin Tang, Barred Goatfish, Surge Damselfish, Oval, Threadfin, Klein's and Yellowhead Butterflyfish, Moorish Idol, Sabre Squirrelfish, Regal Angelfish, Yellowbar and Roundhead Parrotfish, Shadowfin Soldierfish and Eyestripe Surgeonfish. A dozen or more Indian Bannerfish were inspecting a coral outcrop while a large shoal of Convict Surgeonfish feasted on algae. Some of the group went ashore on the island, taking a walk along the beach.

After lunch we set off again, heading for South Ari Atoll. Our efforts at spotting were hampered by choppy seas though Keana, expertly handled by the captain, coped well and it was not an uncomfortable journey. Chas mused that perhaps the dolphins were avoiding this area as the False Killer Whales had been patrolling it – occasional predation and aggression towards Spinner and Spotted Dolphins has been recorded. Chas also explained that Spinner Dolphins, the most abundant species in the Maldives, hunt at night in open sea but spend the day resting inside the channels between the atolls and regular encounters with them are normal, but not today at least!

We arrived at Dhigurah, our anchorage for the night in South Ari Atoll in time for a late afternoon snorkel on a beautiful stretch of reef. The bright outcrops of new growth blue and purple coral showed encouraging recovery from the bleaching that occurred in 2016, caused by a sudden but temporary localised rise in sea temperature. In amongst the dazzling reef landscape we found Black-eyed Thicklip Wrasse, shoals of tiny black and white striped Humbug Dascyllus darting in and out of their coral garden; Shadowfin Soldierfish, Spotted Unicornfish, Coral Rabbitfish, Yellowstripe Goatfish, Yellowbar Parrotfish, Klein's Butterflyfish, Slate Pencil Urchin, Cushion Star and the splendidly named Queen Coris and Snowflake Moray Eel – so many new and interesting reef species.

After a shower, some of the group gathered as usual in the bar to pore over photographs and check species identification in order to compile the daily list of fish and other reef animals. Others were happy to enjoy a cool drink and watch the sun go down.

Before dinner Chas gave us a fascinating illustrated talk on the dolphins of the Maldives. As South Ari Atoll is a Manta hot spot we were on the look out for mantas at the back of the boat but tonight we drew a blank.

Day 8

Friday 14th February

Dhigurah to Maayafushi on North Ari Atoll

We set off at 6.45 with the Dhoni scouting for Manta Rays in the shallower sea around Dhigali Haa reef. We were in luck, and found a Reef Manta swimming close by. With mask, snorkel and fins in place, we were ready for the signal to go and one by one we slipped into the water, trying not to make too much of splash and scare it off. Mantas usually feed at mid-depth in areas where currents ensure a constant stream of zooplankton. Reef Mantas are year round residents in the Maldives but migrate around the atolls with the changing monsoons and

plankton abundance. There is an estimated population of 5,000 of them in the Maldives, of which 4,300 have been identified (each individual has unique skin patterns). As we discovered, an underwater encounter with these incredibly graceful swimmers is unforgettable, but often fleeting, as they are fast movers and can reach swim speeds of up to 15 mph. Unlike Whale Sharks, which suck in water, Mantas rely on speed to feed, opening their gaping basket-like mouths to allow food to enter. We had several goes in the water climbing back on board up the Dhoni's ladder between swims so as to let the captain repositioned the boat.

Back on Keana, we tucked into a well-earned breakfast, heading out to open sea beyond the atoll. We passed several high-end island resorts and discussed how important tourism is to the Maldivian economy, accounting for 36% of GDP, ahead of fishing, the second most important economic sector.

Now making our way up the west side of Ari Atoll, we encountered many flying fish, stirred into action to escape our boat. We spotted a few Brown Noddies and Black-naped Terns in flight along the way. Chas explained how the development of coral cays for tourism has affecting the breeding success of Terns in the Maldives due to human disturbance. In order to address this, resorts are being asked to create artificial platforms for the Terns to nest on, away from disturbance – let's hope it works!

We failed to find any dolphins but the ever-changing hues of turquoise as we went from deeper to shallower water made for wonderful photographs.

Leaving the open sea and heading east through channels between the islands we at last encountered a group of around 25 Spinner Dolphins taking synchronised five-minute dives and then reappearing briefly on the surface for breaths. These were resting dolphins and it was important that we didn't disturb them. Whales and dolphins cannot sleep, as unlike us they are voluntary rather than automatic breathers, but studies of captive dolphins have shown that they are able to shut down one half of their brain at a time, while the other half remains awake to control their breathing. With synchronised shallow dives and gentle coordinated movements on the surface to reoxygenate, they are able to rest.

Arriving at Maayafushi there was time for an afternoon snorkel during which we spotted several less common species: Harlequin Sweetlips, Brushtail Tang, Humpback Unicornfish, Starry Puffer, Maldivian Anemonefish and Green-nose Parrotfish. Some of the group were lucky to get views of Nurse Shark, Black-tip Reef Shark, Spotted Porcupinefish and Hawksbill Turtle.

Back on board we gathered for drinks at the bar to a most memorable tropical sunset of scattered mackerel clouds glowing flame orange, then red fading to a pastel pink. Chas spoke this evening about the different cetacean species found in the Maldives and in particular those we had encountered during our trip and also touched on the Tuna fishery as well.

The evening will forever be remembered as the night of the Mantas – we thought we'd seen and experienced it all but not quite – there was yet another fantastic experience in store for us. First one, then two Reef Mantas had gathered at the back of the boat to feed on plankton. Some of us got in the sea with mask and snorkel to observe them feeding underwater, while others watched from above. It was quite an event, with Indian Mackerel, Remoras, Giant Jack and Bluefin Jack joining the feeding frenzy, together with zillions of tiny Silver Sprats.

Day 9

Saturday 15th February

Maayafushi to Male

The day dawned calm and clear as we headed east through the atoll's kingfisher blue sea, stopping for a morning snorkel on one of the many pristine reefs. Susanne spotted a young Nurse Shark sheltering under a rocky ledge. Sandy, Evi, Cyndy and Cathy saw Roundhead Parrotfish, Checkerboard Wrasse, Five-stripe Wrasse, Humbug Dascyllus and Blue-green Chromis in their coral associated schools, Collared Butterflyfish (a nocturnal species unlike other Butterflyfish which are diurnal), a Slate Pencil Urchin, Giant Clam, a Black-spotted Sea Cucumber feeding and a bright orange Christmas Tree worm. We also admired contrasting soft and hard corals.

After lunch, all eyes were on the search for dolphins in the channels between the atolls but without luck. Approaching Male, the Maldives' capital it was rather a culture shock to see its high-rise buildings on the skyline. We still had time for one last snorkel by Kandu oi Giri Island, which has a small fish-processing plant. Chas explained that the effluent from the factory attracts fish to feed on the scraps and we were not disappointed. Dozens of Whiptail Stingrays and a Black-blotched Stingray were patrolling the sea floor for scraps below us – a spectacular sight. A Spotted Eagle Ray, Hawksbill Turtle and Bigfin Reef Squid also swam by. Giant, Honeycomb and Undulated Morays came out of their hiding places to feed and we could appreciate their true size. Thousands of Schooling Bannerfish were drifting in the current along with Yellow-finned Surgeonfish, Red-toothed Triggerfish and Clown Triggerfish. Cyndy spotted a False Stonefish, very well camouflaged against a rocky background. A fearsome Titan Triggerfish was vigorously defending its eggs and was not shy in letting visitors know they were not welcome.

The clarity of the water coupled with the numbers of fish made this a very special last snorkel but all too soon it was time to climb the Dhoni ladder for the last time and head for our mooring in Male. Kevin, Marilyn, Evi and Caroline had stayed on the boat and had a moment of excitement with a visit from an Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin. A flock of Cattle Egrets flew in to roost at sunset and a Common Myna flew by.

Before dinner, Chas briefed us on the other trips he runs for Naturetrek in Indonesia and Alex showed us the wonderful film he'd made from video clips taken during our week-long journey, including some impressive underwater filming and drone sequences of the whales and dolphins we'd seen.

After dinner we thanked all the Keana staff and Chas for their hard work in looking after us so well and giving us the trip of a lifetime, full of many wondrous encounters with such an array of wildlife great and small.

Day 10

Sunday 16th February

Return flight to the UK

Lorna, Wendy, John, Ruth and Evi were on the early flight to Dubai and we said goodbye to them as they boarded the Dhoni for a transfer to the airport after breakfast. The rest of group had a bit of a lie in and a slightly later breakfast before transferring to the airport. With just a tinge of envy, we said our farewells to Cindy who was spending an additional night on Bandos before returning to the UK. It was a long slow process to get through security and passport control but finally we were all set to board the flight to Dubai. As we took off, there were wonderful glimpses of the atolls and reefs through the clouds, a last view of the paradise that is Maldives.

Arriving at Dubai, we then transferred to the onward flight to London Heathrow, where we said our final goodbyes at the luggage belts.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays



Cruise Map

Species Lists

Cetaceans (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Scientific name	Common name	February										
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		
1	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>					2						
2	False Killer Whale	<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>					40						
3	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>				50			25				
4	Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>					1				1		
5	Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		30	50								
6	Pan-tropical Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>				100+							

Fish

1	Whale Shark	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>			✓								
2	Black-tipped Reef Shark	<i>Carcharinus melanopterus</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓			
3	White-tipped Reef Shark	<i>Triaenodon obesus</i>			✓		✓		✓				
4	Nurse Shark	<i>Nebrius ferrugineus</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓			
5	Black-blotched Stingray	<i>Taeniura meyeni</i>	✓									✓	
6	Reef Manta	<i>Manta alfredi (formerly birostris)</i>			✓					✓			
7	Spotted Eagle Ray	<i>Aetobatus narinari</i>											✓
8	Whiptail Stingray	<i>Himantura fai</i>											✓
9	Giant Moray	<i>Gymnothorax javanicus</i>			✓	✓							✓
10	Undulated Moray	<i>Gymnothorax undulatus</i>											✓
11	Honeycomb Moray	<i>Gymnothorax favagineus</i>											✓
12	Snowflake (Clouded) Moray	<i>Echidna nebulosa</i>											✓
13	Silver Sprat	<i>Spratelloides gracilis</i>			✓							✓	
14	Reef Top Pipefish	<i>Corythoichthys haematopterus</i>										✓	
15	Smooth Flutemouth	<i>Fistularia commersonii</i>	✓					✓					
16	Shadowfin Soldierfish	<i>Myripristis adusta</i>							✓				
17	Blotcheye Soldierfish	<i>Myripristis murdjan</i>				✓							
18	Violet Soldierfish	<i>Myripristis violacea</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓				
19	White-tail Squirrelfish	<i>Sargocentron caudimaculatum</i>		✓	✓								
20	Spotfin Squirrelfish	<i>Neoniphon samara</i>		✓									
21	Blackfin Squirrelfish	<i>Neoniphon opercularis</i>					✓						
22	Sabre Squirrelfish	<i>Sargocentron spiniferum</i>				✓		✓	✓				
23	Common Lionfish	<i>Pterois volitans</i>				✓							
24	Spotfin Lionfish	<i>Pterois antennata</i>				✓							
25	White-line Lionfish	<i>Pterois radiata</i>											✓
26	False Scorpionfish	<i>Scorpaenopsis diabolus</i>											✓
27	Squaretail Coral Grouper	<i>Plectropomus areolatus</i>			✓	✓							
28	Peacock Rock Cod	<i>Cephalopholis argus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				
29	Slender Grouper	<i>Anyperodon leucogrammicus</i>										✓	
30	Honeycomb Grouper	<i>Epinephelus merra</i>		✓					✓				
31	Four Saddle Grouper	<i>Epinephelus spilotoceps</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			
32	Blacktip Grouper	<i>Ephinephelus fasciatus</i>				✓							
33	Greasy Grouper	<i>Epinephelus tauvina</i>				✓							
34	Orange Anthias	<i>Pseudanthius squamipennis</i>		✓									
35	Crescent-tail Bigeye	<i>Priacanthus hamrur</i>						✓					
36	Hayashi's Cardinalfish	<i>Pseudamia hayashii</i>											✓
37	Bluefin Jack	<i>Caranx melampygus</i>		✓								✓	
38	Giant Jack	<i>Caranx ignobilis</i>										✓	
39	Small-spotted Dart	<i>Trachinotus baillonii</i>		✓									

	Scientific name	Common name	February									
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
40	Striped Remora (Slender Suckerfish)	<i>Echeneis naucrates</i>			✓					✓		
41	Kashmir Snapper	<i>Lutjanus kasmira</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
42	Yellowtail Blue Snapper	<i>Paracaesio xanthura</i>					✓					
43	Lunar Fusilier	<i>Caesio lunaris</i>					✓			✓		
44	Yellow-back Fusilier	<i>Caesio xanthonota</i>					✓			✓		
45	Neon Fusilier	<i>Pterocaesio tile</i>								✓		
46	Striped Fusilier	<i>Pterocaesio trilineata</i>								✓		
47	Goldband Fusilier	<i>Pteracaesio chrysozona</i>							✓	✓		
48	Oriental Sweetlips	<i>Plectorhinchus orientalis</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
49	Harlequin Sweetlips	<i>Plectorhinchus chaetodonoides</i>								✓		
50	Gold-striped Emperor	<i>Gnathodentex aureolineatus</i>	✓									
51	Brassy (Lowfin) Rudderfish	<i>Kyphosus vaigiensis</i>	✓							✓		
52	Bigeye Bream	<i>Monotaxis grandoculis</i>		✓				✓	✓		✓	
53	Two-lined Monocle Bream	<i>Scolopsis bilineatus</i>		✓					✓			
54	Yellowstripe Goatfish	<i>Mulloidichthys flavolineatus</i>							✓			
55	Yellow-saddle Goatfish	<i>Parupensis cyclostomus</i>								✓		
56	Barred Goatfish	<i>Parupeneus trifasciatus</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓		
57	Longbarbel Goatfish	<i>Parupeneus cyclostomus</i>		✓				✓	✓		✓	
58	Threadfin Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon auriga</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓			
59	Bennett's Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon bennetti</i>					✓					
60	Citron Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon citrinellus</i>			✓							
61	Collared Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon collare</i>	✓		✓					✓	✓	
62	Double-saddle Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon falcula</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
63	Klein's Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon kleinii</i>			✓				✓			
64	Racoon Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon lunula</i>				✓	✓	✓			✓	
65	Blackback Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon merlannotus</i>							✓			
66	Meyer's Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon meyeri</i>		✓	✓				✓			
67	Oval butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon trifasciatus</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	
68	Triangular Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon triangulum</i>						✓		✓		
69	Chevron Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon trifascialis</i>		✓								
70	Yellow-head Butterflyfish	<i>Chaetodon xanthocephalus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Long-nose Butterflyfish	<i>Forcipiger flavissimus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Very Long-nose Butterflyfish	<i>Forcipiger longirostris</i>		✓				✓				
73	Black Pyramid Butterflyfish	<i>Hemitaurchthys zoster</i>		✓				✓			✓	
74	Indian Bannerfish	<i>Heniochus pleurotinia</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
75	Schooling Bannerfish	<i>Heniochus diphreutus</i>									✓	
76	Emperor Angelfish	<i>Pomacanthus imperator</i>			✓				✓	✓		
77	Regal Angelfish	<i>Pygoplites diacanthus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
78	Forster's (Blackside) Hawkfish	<i>Paracirrhites forsteri</i>		✓							✓	
79	Surge Hawkfish	<i>Cirrhitus pinnulatus</i>									✓	
80	Green Damsel	<i>Amblyglyphidodon batunai</i>									✓	
81	Blackfoot or Maldive Anemonefish	<i>Amphipron nigripes</i>	✓					✓		✓		
82	Clark's Anemonefish	<i>Amphipron clarkii</i>									✓	
83	Sergeant Major	<i>Abudefduf vaigiensis</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓		
84	Chocolate-dip Chromis	<i>Chromis dimidiata</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
85	Blue-green Chromis	<i>Chromis viridis</i>	✓			✓			✓		✓	
86	Surge Damsel	<i>Chrysiptera brownriggii</i>							✓		✓	
87	Onespot Damsel	<i>Chrysiptera unimaculata</i>							✓			
88	Humbag Dascyllus	<i>Dascyllus aruanus</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓	
89	Indian Dascyllus	<i>Pomacentrus indicus</i>		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	
90	Caerulean Damsel	<i>Pomacentrus caeruleus</i>						✓				

	Scientific name	Common name	February									
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
91	Philippine Damsel	<i>Pomacentrus philippinus</i>									✓	
92	Peacock Damsel	<i>Pomacentrus pavo</i>	✓									
93	Redbreasted Maori Wrasse	<i>Cheilinus fasciatus</i>			✓						✓	
94	Cheeklined Maori Wrasse	<i>Oxycheilinus digrammus</i>									✓	
95	Yellowtail Wrasse	<i>Anampses meleagrides</i>		✓								
96	Yellowbreasted Wrasse	<i>Anampses twistii</i>							✓			
97	Tripletail Wrasse	<i>Cheilinus trilobatus</i>			✓			✓				
98	Napoleon Wrasse	<i>Cheilinus undulatus</i>										✓
99	Bird Wrasse	<i>Gomphosus caeruleus</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	
100	Checkerboard Wrasse	<i>Halichoerus hortulanus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓			
101	Zigzag Wrasse	<i>Haliichoeres scapularis</i>		✓								
102	Moon Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma lunare</i>		✓	✓			✓				
103	Blunthead Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma amblycephalum</i>						✓				
104	Six-barred Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma hardwicke</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
105	Fivestripe Wrasse	<i>Thalassoma quinquevittatum</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓	
106	Indian Ocean Pinstriped Wrasse	<i>Haliichoeres vrolikii</i>						✓				
107	Bicolor Cleaner Wrasse	<i>Labroides bicolor</i>						✓				
108	Cleaner Wrasse	<i>Labroides dimidiatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
109	Barred Thicklip Wrasse	<i>Hemigymnus fasciatus</i>							✓			
110	Blackeye Thicklip Wrasse	<i>Hemigymnus melapterus</i>						✓	✓		✓	
111	Queen Coris	<i>Coris formosa</i>							✓			
112	Bicolour Parrotfish	<i>Cetoscarus bicolor</i>		✓					✓	✓		
113	Roundhead Parrotfish	<i>Chlorurus strongylocephalus</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓	
114	Bullethead Parrotfish	<i>Chlorurus sordidus</i>		✓				✓			✓	
115	Bridled Parrotfish	<i>Scarus frenatus</i>		✓	✓			✓				
116	Dusky Parrotfish	<i>Scarus niger</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
117	Greencheek Parrotfish	<i>Scarus prasiognathus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
118	Bartail Parrotfish	<i>Scarus caudofasciatus</i>									✓	
119	Yellowbar Parrotfish	<i>Scarus scaber</i>		✓	✓						✓	
120	Ember Parrotfish	<i>Scarus rubroviolaceus</i>									✓	✓
121	Greennose Parrotfish	<i>Scarus viridifucatus</i>									✓	
122	Tricolor Parrotfish	<i>Scarus tricolor</i>						✓				
123	Longnose Parrotfish	<i>Hipposcarus harid</i>										✓
124	Spot-tailed Sandperch	<i>Parapercis hexopthalma</i>		✓								
125	Circular Batfish	<i>Platax orbicularis</i>			✓							
126	Coral Rabbitfish	<i>Siganus corallinus</i>						✓	✓	✓		
127	Moorish Idol	<i>Zanclus cornutus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
128	Powder-blue Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus leucosternon</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
129	Lined Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus lineatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
130	Eye-stripe Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus nigricauda</i>							✓			
131	Blackspot Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus bariene</i>										✓
132	Convict Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus triostegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			
133	Yellowfin Surgeonfish	<i>Acanthurus xanthopterus</i>										✓
134	Lined Bristletooth Surgeonfish	<i>Ctenochaetus striatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
135	Goldring Bristletooth Surgeonfish	<i>Ctenochaetus truncatus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
136	Humpback Unicornfish	<i>Naso brachycentron</i>									✓	
137	Bluespine Unicornfish	<i>Naso unicornis</i>										✓
138	Orange-spine Unicornfish	<i>Naso lituratus</i>	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	
139	Spotted Unicornfish	<i>Naso brevirostris</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
140	Brushtail Tang	<i>Zebrasoma scopas</i>		✓							✓	
141	Sailfin Tang	<i>Zebrasoma desjardini</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		

	Scientific name	Common name	February										
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		
142	Yellowfin Tuna	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>		✓		✓	✓						
143	Indian Mackerel	<i>Rastrelliger kanagurta</i>									✓		
144	Flying Fish	<i>Exocetus spp</i>		✓	✓	✓					✓		
145	Mimic Filefish	<i>Palaluteres prionurus</i>				✓							
146	Sand filefish	<i>Malacanthus lutovittatus</i>										✓	
147	Clown Triggerfish	<i>Balistapus conspicillum</i>			✓	✓					✓	✓	
148	Orange-Striped Triggerfish	<i>Balistapus undulatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
149	Yellow-margin Triggerfish	<i>Pseudobalistes flavimarginatus</i>			✓								
150	Titan Triggerfish	<i>Balistapus viridescens</i>		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	
151	Picasso Triggerfish	<i>Rhinecanthus aculeatus</i>	✓			✓							
152	Red-toothed Triggerfish	<i>Odonus niger</i>		✓								✓	
153	Wedge-tailed Triggerfish	<i>Rhinecanthus rectangulus</i>				✓							
154	Yellow Boxfish	<i>Ostracion cubicus</i>					✓				✓		
155	Black or Spotted Boxfish	<i>Ostracion meleagris</i>										✓	
156	Long-horned Cowfish	<i>Lactoria cornuta</i>											
157	Guineafowl Pufferfish	<i>Arothron meleagris</i>					✓						
158	Black-spotted Pufferfish	<i>Arothron nigropunctatus</i>							✓	✓	✓		
159	Starry Pufferfish	<i>Arothron stellatus</i>				✓					✓		
160	Saddled Sharpnose Pufferfish	<i>Canthigaster valentini</i>					✓				✓		
162	Blotched Porcupinefish	<i>Diodon liturosus</i>					✓				✓	✓	
163	Spotted Porcupinefish	<i>Diodon hystrix</i>			✓	✓					✓		

Other Reef Animals

1	Bigfin Reef Squid	<i>Sepioteuthis lessoniana</i>	✓								✓		
2	Big Blue Octopus	<i>Octopus cyanea</i>	✓										
3	A lobster	Probable <i>Panulirus sp.</i>	✓										
4	Painted Spiny Lobster	<i>Panulirus versicolor</i>			✓				✓	✓			
5	Horned-eyed Ghost Land Crab	<i>Oycpode ceratophthalmus</i>					✓						
6	Mottled Shore Crab	<i>Grapsus albolineatus</i>					✓						
7	Giant Clam	<i>Tridacna gigas</i>	✓				✓						
8	Large Giant Clam	<i>Tridacna maxima</i>					✓	✓					
9	Boring Clam	<i>Tridacna crocea</i>					✓						
10	Varicose Wart Slug	<i>Phyllidia varicosa</i>							✓				
11	Ceylon Nudibranch	<i>Gymnodoris ceylonica</i>		✓									
12	Indian Sea Star	<i>Fromia indica</i>					✓						
13	Thousand Pores Sea Star	<i>Fromia milleporella</i>							✓				
14	A Sea Star	<i>Linckia sp.</i>		✓									
15	Granulated Sea Star	<i>Coriaster granulatus</i>									✓		
16	Cushion Star	<i>Culcita novaeguineae</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓			
17	Crown of Thorns	<i>Acanthaster planci</i>		✓							✓		
18	Black Featherstar	<i>Colobometra perspinosa</i>					✓						
19	Slate Pencil Urchin	<i>Heterocentrotus mamillatus</i>							✓			✓	
20	Black Longspine Urchin	<i>Diadema setosum</i>				✓	✓	✓					
21	Burrowing Urchin	<i>Echinometra mathaei</i>			✓		✓						
22	Black-spotted Sea Cucumber	<i>Pearsonothuria graeffei</i>		✓									
23	Elephant Trunk Sea Cucumber	<i>Holothuria fuscopunctata</i>							✓				
24	Greenfish Sea Cucumber	<i>Stichopus chloronotus</i>			✓	✓							
25	Brownfish Sea Cucumber	<i>Bohadschia marmorata</i>									✓		
26	Graeff's Sea Cucumber	<i>Bohadschia graeffei</i>						✓					
27	Christmas Tree Worm	<i>Spirobranchus giganteus</i>										✓	
28	A sponge	<i>Spheciospongia vagabunda</i>				✓							

	Scientific name	Common name	February									
			8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
29	Mushroom leather Coral	<i>Sarcophyton sp.</i>								✓	✓	
30	Crumpled Leather Coral	<i>Sarcophyton sp.</i>							✓	✓	✓	
31	Mushroom Coral	<i>Fungia fungites</i>				✓			✓			
32	Bud Acropora Coral	<i>Acropora gemmifera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
33	Pine Platygyra Coral	<i>Platygyra pini</i>										✓
34	Knobby Leather Coral	<i>Lobophytum sp.</i>		✓				✓		✓	✓	
35	Staghorn Coral	<i>Acropora sp.</i>		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	

Birds (H = heard only)

1	Tropical Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bailloni</i>					✓					
2	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	✓									
3	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>									✓	
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓
5	Little Egret	<i>Ardea garzetta</i>	✓									
6	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓								
7	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓					✓				
8	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>						✓	✓			
9	Lesser Noddy	<i>Anous tenuirostris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
10	Swift (Great Crested) Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>				✓						
11	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>		✓	✓			✓				
12	Saunders's Tern	<i>Sternula saundersi</i>						✓				
13	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	✓	✓						✓	✓	
14	Crimson Rosella	<i>Platycercus elegans</i>	✓									
15	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	✓	✓		H						
16	Maldivian House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens maledivicus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓
17	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>										✓

Other Taxa

1	Fruit Bat	<i>Pteropus giganteus ssp maldivarum</i>	✓	✓								
2	Hawksbill Turtle	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>				✓				✓	✓	
3	Common Spiny Lizard	<i>Coletes versicolor</i>	✓	✓								



Fish soup



Powder-blue Surge wrasse party