

Solomon Islands – A Wildlife Cruise in the South Pacific!

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 15 December 2018



Bat Fish with Cleaner Wrasse



Rough-toothed Dolphins



Omura's Whales mum and calf



Pygmy Killer Whales

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Summary

On Naturetrek's first wildlife holiday exploration of the Solomon Islands, our group of 17 had the unique opportunity to explore the archipelago's relatively intact forested islands and impressive, healthy coral reefs – some of the best in the world. During our 10-day sailing from Guadalcanal to the New Georgia islands in the Western Province, we encountered no less than 16 species of cetacean including Omura's Whale – the first sightings in the Solomon Islands since 1976. Other highlights included Dwarf Sperm Whales, Blainville's Beaked Whales, numerous dolphins such as Fraser's and Spinners, and the less common Rough-toothed Dolphins and Pygmy Killer Whales. We identified over 130 species of tropical fish, with a huge diversity of butterflyfish, anemone fish and White-tip and Black-tip Reef Sharks. Birds included Beach Kingfishers, Island Imperial Pigeons, Claret-breasted Fruit Dove, cuckooshrikes, Black-naped Terns, Solomon Cockatoos and Cardinal Lories.

Day 1/2

Saturday 1st/Sunday 2nd December

In flight to Brisbane, via Dubai

Day 3

Monday 3rd December

Airport transfer and flight to Honiara, Solomon Islands

This morning we met for breakfast at 6.30am; it was a bright sunny day in Brisbane and felt really tropical – they had just had their hottest day this year. We headed to the airport at 7.15am, ready for our 10am flight to the Solomon Islands and to meet the rest of the group for the main tour. Chas and Ed met everyone at the gate or plane and had a smooth journey north-east to the Solomon Islands, arriving after 2 hours and 45 minutes.

Coming to the capital, Honiara, we flew over the pluming clouds rising above the mountains and then over the farmed lowlands and a braided river before landing on a very hot, sunny tropical day. With security and baggage collection straight forward, we exchanged some money and met Lyndon and Lennard from the Bilikiki. Once everyone was gathered, our luggage went into a small van and we headed for half an hour to our hotel, travelling through Honiara. Many people were travelling home, or to school, and the streets were busy with people and stalls selling fresh fruits, nuts and vegetables. Common Mynas were everywhere while Pacific Swallows (now known as House Swallows by Birdlife) were swooping around.

After checking in and being seen to our rooms by porters, we had a few hours to spare before meeting with Ed and Chas at 6pm by the beach pool bar. A few dozen Singing Starlings were gathering on the nearby palms and roofs and a Willie Wagtail was up on a roof at dusk. Mynas were all around and an Eastern Osprey was seen a little earlier flying across the mariner. We were joined by Mark O'Brien from Birdlife International. After a quick welcome by Ed, Chas set out the plan for the next day and showed the rough area we would be sailing. Mark, who is the Regional Programming Coordinator for Birdlife, then provided insights into the conservation of birdlife in the Solomons and how we can contribute. There was then time to mingle before meeting for dinner at 7pm. Despite waiting on Solomon time for our food, once it came it was delicious!

Day 4

Tuesday 4th December

Honiara and embarking Bilikiki

We had the day to enjoy the hotel, sea and town before meeting for our boat at 3.30pm. It was light by 5-5.30am and hot by 7am! Throughout the hotel grounds and along the road bright red-flowering Poinciana trees were filling the area with colour and good places to look for Spotted Starlings, Metallic Starlings and bright red Cardinal Lories. A Common Sandpiper was feeding down by the shoreline where crabs were hanging out on the rocks. Throughout the day we were able to visit the museum, with some fascinating artefacts, pop into the tourist office and take in the hustle and bustle of a Tuesday morning. Further along the road, a distinctive building was the market place and inside were tens of market holders with a colourful array of fruits, vegetables, necklaces and drinks. Outside, large ice boxes contained fish, with some such as tuna out on display. Crabs were laid out ready to buy as were shellfish including large clams. It was a remarkable scene with people buying their daily produce.

Roger visited the nearby botanic gardens and spotted a Sanford's Sea Eagle (also known as Solomons Eagle) plus Glossy Swiftlets, Long-tailed Mynas and Coconut Lories; Ian had seen a Solomons Cockatoo. Around the hotel throughout the day Spotted Starlings and Common Mynas were usually around in the trees or on the lawns. Olive-backed Sunbirds, bright yellow little birds, were occasionally in nearby trees or feeding on the nectar of flowers. Out from the coast Little Terns were common.

We checked out at midday and, with several hours before being picked up, we spent time having lunch, reading and going for a stroll. The humidity was high, and it wasn't long before darker clouds rolled in. Just before we left, thunder cracked, and a heavy tropical rain deluge ensued! It continued for a while; as it eased off towards 4pm we made our way on to the bus and down to the marina. Despite the rain, with umbrellas provided by the crew, we made our way in groups onto the tinnies - the metal transfer boats used for diving - and on to the Bilikiki, our home for the next 10 days. As we all came aboard, Black-naped Terns and Common Terns were flying past. We were greeted by Pato and Fernando who would be our hosts as part of the larger crew of 13 during our tour. With final tweaks and adjustments being sorted behind the scenes, we had time to unpack and familiarise ourselves with the boat. As the light faded we met together on the top deck at 6pm for a briefing, accompanied by savoury snacks, before dinner and setting sail at 7pm. We ate a delicious chicken curry (or tofu alternative) with green beans, pak choi and onion, salad and slices of roasted pumpkin. After our ginger cake and cream everyone chatted away before looking out for the flashing of light, or bioluminescence produced by plankton, in the bow waves. There were various flashes of bioluminescence when we looked closely, plus flying fish evading the boat by flying out of the water and away. We arrived at our destination, near the Florida Islands at 9pm and anchored up for the night.

Day 5

Wednesday 5th December

Florida Islands

Just as it was getting light at 5.30am, a few of the group began to appear for a tea or coffee. Just beneath the water, by the boat, Sapphire Copepods, tiny shrimps with bright kingfisher-blue reflective carapaces were floating in the water. On the island nearby several Solomons Cockatoos were in the trees and a Brahminy Kite was perched on the rocks along the shoreline. Island Imperial Pigeons, Jackdaw-like in flight, flew overhead and one perched alongside a cockatoo. Breakfast was at 6am and as we finished off some dolphins were spotted

offshore. We slowly headed over and watched a small group of Spinner Dolphins, followed by another group further away. This species hunts fish at night in the deeper waters and comes into the shallows to rest during the daytime. One or two leapt out of the water.

A group of slower, slightly larger dolphins with uniform grey skin and falcated dorsal fins then appeared. They were Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins, and as they surfaced there were at least 30 – 40. Meanwhile, various terns passed by, including Greater Crested Terns, Common Terns and Black-naped Terns; Ian spotted a frigatebird in the distance. As we sailed round to our snorkelling location a Sooty Tern and several Bridled Terns flew past. We passed by very basic villages and houses and stopped just offshore. Two Collared Kingfishers were perched in a dead tree, being mobbed by a Willie Wagtail, and a White-bellied Cuckooshrike was perched in another dead tree.

Mbokoallbeti Island, Leitongo Bay, Simon's Nature Reserve

We had a snorkelling briefing at 7.45am. Kitted up, we headed out in the tinnies to warm, sunny and shallow reefs, ideal for our first snorkel in the Solomons. We weren't disappointed; beneath the water we saw hundreds of colourful fishes including at least three species of anemone fish, like those in the film, 'Finding Nemo'. Highlights included a cast of colourful parrotfish, wrasse, damsels, angelfish, Clouded Lizardfish, Spade Fish, Hinged Shrimpfish, a stingray, Blue Sea Stars, Black Featherstars, including a small one actually swimming – a rare sighting, giant clams and sea cucumbers. Branching Coral, Leather Coral, Boulder Coral, anemones, zoanthid colonies, tunicates and other smaller shellfish made up the broader reef habitat that the fish were living amongst. After an hour we headed back to the Bilikiki to shower, dry off and enjoy some freshly made scones and popcorn which became regular every morning and afternoon.

We headed north towards the Russell Islands, passing amongst hundreds of Lesser Frigatebirds, the males sporting white underwing lines under each wing. They were circling above Brown Boobies and terns that were feeding on small fish heading towards the sea's surface to escape Yellow-finned Tuna below. The clue to the type of tuna was in the dolphins, Pantropical Spotted Dolphins in fact, which associate with this species of tuna. We spent time with a large school of spotted dolphins, with many rising the bow and giving clear and prolonged views. As we headed on more frigatebirds soared overhead. Chas had spotted some bigger animals and as we edged closer, they suddenly appeared from behind us; they were Short-finned Pilot Whales. Over the next hour or so we had many views of them, distant at first; we gradually saw them closer and over lunch had them surfacing near the boat. There were over 20 and when there was a sudden bout of surfacing and blows, they would disappear, heading on their way under water. They did this several times. It was a great chance to see their thick, falcated dorsal fin, large size and bulbous head. After a delicious lunch of lentil soup, pizza and melon, or tomato salad, we continued on our journey.

Along the journey we passed several more bustling flocks of frigatebirds, Brown Boobies and a mix of adult and juvenile Sooty Terns, alongside some smaller terns. Big splashes were from Yellow-finned Tuna which often leapt out of the water. The frigatebirds were usually in pursuit of terns for their food. At 1.45pm we encountered a small group of Risso's Dolphins, their distinctive tall dorsal fin a classic feature. They were just logging after a night's feeding on squid no doubt. Passing the small island of Savo, we continued west towards the Russell Islands. We stopped briefly at 3.50pm for some more Spinner Dolphins which were also sleepy and quiet.

After some time sailing in calm waters with no sightings, around 5pm some very distant dolphins were spotted. By 5.15pm they were leaping out of the water towards us, twisting in some cases! These were Striped Dolphins

and in the later afternoon light we had lovely views of their pink bellies, grey back and stripe markings. There were 50 – 100 in the school, including some small calves and larger ‘teenagers’. Individuals were jumping clear of the water, including some of the younger animals. The acrobatics and surfacing went on and on, with animals bow riding too. By 5.35pm it was time to leave the dolphins and head on towards the Russell Islands. Chas explained later that the pink belly is typical of dolphins in the tropics; as the dolphins get hot the blood flows closer to the surface of the skin. Where the skin is unpigmented and white, it shows through as pink.

As the light just began to drop at 6.15pm we had one more show of dolphins, a small group of spotted dolphins, quietly surfacing. We let them be, and over the next 45 minutes enjoyed a beautiful sunset over the Russell Islands; during this time the combination of clouds, colours (red, orange, pink, blue, black), and position of the sun created an ever-changing, stunning landscape.

We met together for a talk by Chas on the dolphins we had encountered today before enjoying another really delicious dinner, followed by a run through of the checklist and adding in many of the new fish we saw today. Everyone then retired for the evening. Nicola and Ed were admiring the stars and planets with Fernando using his constellation app.

Day 6

Thursday 6th December

Russell Islands: Snorkelling at Kaukau Island and Mane Island

After we enjoyed a good night's sleep anchored off one of the Russell Islands, birds began appearing at dawn. Cardinal Lories and Coconut Lories were passing overhead, coming out of their roost. A pair of very white Beach Kingfishers were sitting on branches sticking out of the sea while a pair of Pacific Black Ducks swam along the water's edge or potted on the sandy beach. Black-naped Terns circled round and dipped over the end of the island. A Striated Heron flew across the water and Ian spotted a Moustached Treeswift. We headed on to our snorkelling site spotting Black-naped Terns fishing, including one that dipped into the sea as a shoal of fish rippled the water, perhaps being chased from beneath by something. Common Terns perched on floating coconuts. And overhead at least four Brahminy Kites, two Eastern Ospreys and an Island Imperial Pigeon passed by. A flock of 20 Black Noddies were circling a particular area of water in front of us, showing their white foreheads as we got closer. Out on the still, glassy water between islands, a school of Spinner Dolphins appeared, leaping out of the water and bow riding. Further along, a second school, heading in the same direction to their resting location, passed by; they seemed quieter, perhaps more tired from their overnight hunting in deeper waters.

We arrived at our snorkelling location and kitted up, heading into the water just after 7.30am. We were at Kaukau Island and snorkelling in Acipora City, an area full of hard corals. We spent an hour snorkelling, spotting some familiar fish from the day before and seeing new ones too. Some of the anemone fish wander away from their anemone homes, although with a little looking, the anemones are usually never far away. Butterflyfish, angelfish, wrasse and parrot fish came in wondrous colours, patterns and shapes.

By 9am we were out of the water, drying off and heading on to our next destination. After low cloud yesterday, today was a brighter, blue-sky day. We headed on, passing a very small, narrow island where a large flock of Brown Noddies and Black-naped Terns took off. A white-phase and a dark-phase Reef Heron were fishing by the coast.

After sailing out east and north-east from the islands we spent a few hours across a calm sea with some swell. Half a dozen Great Crested Terns were fishing by the boat, diving down to the sea – mostly with success – to catch fish that the wash of the boat had disturbed. At 11.15am we had sightings of cetaceans, Short-finned Pilot Whales. There were over 20 and we spent time alongside them, slowly seeing them closer until they were just logging on the surface. There was one particularly large male amongst them who later on surfaced very close to the Bilikiki. A few dolphins had been seen, to Chas' curiosity. Fortunately, they re-appeared, and it soon became apparent these were an uncommon tropical dolphin, the Rough-toothed Dolphin. We spent a good half an hour with them, while the pilot whales were surfacing all around. In crystal-clear water the dolphins showed incredibly well. Much less sporty and showy than other dolphins above water, looking beneath the bow we could see them interacting with each other, showing their bellies and no doubt mating. We had them surfacing near the boat, with plenty of time to appreciate their characteristics including a long, sloping forehead, mottled skin colour and a dark narrow cape that runs along the back and includes the dorsal fin. As lunch was ready, the dolphins became less obvious while the pilot whales were showing well. Finally, we succumbed to lunch and the Bilikiki started heading back in towards the Russell Islands.

Throughout the rest of the afternoon we passed many beautiful tropical islands and occasionally saw local people rowing past in dugout canoes. Many of the islands were full of planted coconut trees, while others still looked naturally colonised by trees and other vegetation. Some islands were raised coral reefs, others raised coral reefs with volcanic ash on top, while others were completely volcanic. The shape and type of vegetation was a giveaway. In trees we saw the occasional egret, Eastern Osprey and Brahminy Kite. In the far distance Ian found a Sanford's Sea Eagle soaring high above the mountains; a further three were also seen. Another was seen well by some in a tree on the coastline. Around 1.30pm a group of 20 Spinner Dolphins passed by, followed by more an hour later and a small school at our snorkelling location at 5pm. Brown Noddies were common along the journey; at one location their activity was attracting local people in their boats, perhaps to fish.

By 5pm we were at Mane Island, ready for our snorkel at Kafaleon. The reef was edged by raised coral reefs now covered in trees and caves. While the sun was moving away from the reef there was still plenty to see amongst the coral, sponges and coralline algae, from sea cucumbers to Peacock-tailed Anemone Shrimps and butterflyfishes to a puffer fish. After an hour we made our way back to the boat with what sounded like hundreds of Cardinal Lories squawking in the background at their roost. As we dried off canoes with families began to arrive at the back of the Bilikiki. It was market-time, and Pato was busy accepting and paying for a wonderful array of fruits and vegetables that looked so colourful and fresh: coconuts, pineapples, tomatoes, aubergines, sweet potatoes and so much more. Mothers, children and teenagers were all part of the busy scene while some of the youngsters had races in the canoes. Once the market was over Sue took to rowing one of the canoes, to the delight of the children who began rowing alongside her in their family canoes.

By now it was dark, and dinner time. As the families slowly sailed away, we had dinner and checklist before admiring the stunning night sky. Looking out from the boat we could see fish catching the light from boats. Bioluminescent worms were forming beautiful trails of light like a snake in the water as they exuded light-emitting chemicals, fishes were swimming here and there, and three or four Black-tip Reef Sharks appeared with their distinctive shapes and movements easy to make out. The odd large bat flew past too, catching the light on their bodies as they passed by.

Day 7

Friday 7th December

Mborokua or Mary Island

Some of us began to gather at 5.45am and sat looking up into the trees. Ian had been up a little earlier and already counted 150 Cardinal Lories and just over 30 Solomons Cockatoos coming out of their roost. Over the next half an hour, we saw more lories and cockatoos plus increasing numbers of Glossy Swiftlets feeding just above the trees and low down by the coast. Three Pacific Swallows circled around the boat. Up in the trees numerous Island Imperial Pigeons were perched or flying around, and in one tree where three pigeons left, a Long-tailed Myna took their place. Before we headed down for breakfast, we had lovely views of a Pied Goshawk carrying prey across the forest and, not long after, could hear it calling. At 6.30am we started on our way to Mborokua or Mary Island.

Thirty minutes later we encountered Short-finned Pilot Whales and spent over an hour or so with them, following parallel in the direction they were heading. Half an hour in they were joined by a group of Pantropical Spotted dolphins. We spent time just cruising along slowly, enjoying time with these animals as they surfaced and in the case of the dolphins swam at the bow of the Bilikiki. We continued on towards the island passing occasional groups of noddies with some Lesser Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies.

At 10.15am Ed spotted some distance cetaceans and, as we closed in, we could see they were a second school of pilot whales. Having been hunting at night they were logging at the surface. We spent half an hour with them, waiting for them to resurface almost in synchrony. There was a large male amongst them and a small calf between two females. Relaxed and resting, we left them and carried on to Mborokua Island.

It wasn't long before we were alongside the island kitting up for snorkelling and, after a briefing from Fernando, we headed out at 11.45am for an hour to snorkel Bilikiki Bay. The island is dome-shaped and a caldera. From the side we went snorkelling we could see where an eruption had exploded half the island out into the ocean with huge volcanic borders on the raised coral beach. Roger was explaining more about how this had happened. We went snorkelling amongst the coral reefs and covered underwater volcanic rock. The reef dropped away more deeply than the others, although the coastline reef and certain parts of the reef were closer to the surface. A myriad of new fish was spotted including unicorn fish, puffer fish, dartfish, beautiful parrotfish, triggerfish and a White-tip Reef Shark swimming beneath us down in the deeper water between reefs. We headed back for lunch, a delicious lasagne with accompanying pineapple salad and green bean salad, and a pumpkin soup.

After lunch, at 2pm, we headed out in the tinnies in the small, exposed bay. Several Reef Herons and an Eastern Great Egret were on the coastline. The steep-sided island slopes were covered in magnificent vegetation – large trees and vines. An Eastern Osprey flew around the bay with a pair of Brahminy Kites nearby. High up at the top of the island a Sanford's Sea Eagle circled, and another dropped height quickly almost down to the coastline. Three Blyth's Hornbills circled around at the top of the island, their elongated bodies a giveaway. Island Imperial Pigeons were common, and the odd Cardinal Lory flew overhead. As the second boat moored a male Eclectus Parrot flew noisily across the bay. As Chas pointed us in the direction of another, which ended up being a beautiful tree flower, we had good views of an eagle passing by through the trees.

Just after 3pm we were on our way again, heading west in beautiful hot tropical sunshine. Along the calm, smooth sea we spotted several Wedge-tailed Shearwaters heading in a south-west direction, perhaps to deeper

waters. What at first looked like two people in a canoe tugging an oil can was in fact a fish aggregation device, a platform to attract tuna beneath. The people were in fact two Brown Boobies, and another was sitting on a plastic drum acting as a float and signal to its presence.

At 6pm, just as the now-golden sun was beginning to set, dolphins were spotted in the distance. After sailing for a short while the dolphins, Spotted Dolphins, began leaping towards us and we spent 25 minutes enjoying their presence as they surfaced around the boat at sunset. We didn't have to travel far before we encountered our next cetacean of the day. As the light was fading Chas shouted beaked whales, and towards the easterly islands of New Georgia we watched five beaked whales surfacing three or four times before disappearing. Their small dorsal fin suggested Blainville's Beaked Whale. As we headed on, to our surprise they reappeared – beaked whales usually dive deep at this point! We had further views of them surfacing with their distinctive rolling behaviour. We continued on, and this time Ed spotted more in the distance. This time a second group, three individuals - a male, female and a young animal - were surfacing. In the fading light we could just make out the male's distinctively shaped head, a lump, where a large tooth protrudes on either side on the head.

We met shortly after at 7.15pm for a fascinating talk by Chas about the history and biology of whales we hoped to see. It was then time for dinner and the checklist with a welcome breeze passing across the boat.

Day 8

Saturday 8th December

Solomon Sea and Wickham Bay

While we were still asleep the boat started up at 5am and began heading out south from the Western Province islands in the deeper Solomon Sea. As we gathered for breakfast, we passed a school of Spotted Dolphins and continued on our way. Fifteen minutes later we encountered some pilot whales and more Spotted Dolphins. We already had 1,000 metres of depth beneath us. After another 15 minutes, three unidentified beaked whales were seen; their surfacing was just too briefing to get any detail.

We passed a fish aggregation device where several Brown Boobies, Lesser Frigatebirds and a single Red-footed Booby, photographed by Chris, were spotted. The floats of the device were often in view throughout the day. At 8.05am we had a baleen whale pass by the boat. After surfacing it was swimming just under water leaving behind fluke prints on the sea's surface. It came up several times more, although not enough to be identified; it was most like Bryde's Whale or Omura's. After it did its last dive and arched its back, indicating it was going deeper, we waited for half an hour or so in case it surfaced. Sadly, it didn't re-surface anywhere in view. Chas looked closer at Sue's photos and confirmed it was a Bryde's Whale. Meanwhile, pilot whales were blowing in the distance, so we went over to see them. A school of logging, relaxed whales were curious, and some were spy-hopping to get a closer look at us. At first, they were joined by Fraser's Dolphins, pink-bellied with a distinctive demarcation between the belly and the darker back. They didn't hang around though and carried on their way while the pilot whales stayed at the surface.

At 10.20am we had sightings of some more beaked whales, this time larger and with taller dorsal fins compared to the Blainville's last night. They dived under, so we waited 20 minutes; they had a calf so wouldn't be under for too long. They resurfaced briefly before going under again. We waited another 20 minutes and didn't find them again. These were either Longman's or Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale, both unusual to see, although probably common in the deep tropical waters.

At 10.50am Chas spotted two logging Dwarf Sperm Whales, their skin glinting in the sunshine. Sadly, they slipped away before everyone could see them. An hour later Mike, and crew-member John, did manage to spot once before it dived. Meanwhile, after the first ones had dived, we spotted three further beaked whales, this time most likely Blainville's. At 11.20am Sue spotted a further beaked whale – it didn't stay long enough to be identified. Only ten minutes later, we were surrounded by a school of Spinner Dolphins; they were more interested in cavorting and sex, so didn't stay. However, we saw various jumps, porpoising and a few impressive twists or spins in the air. Just before lunch at 12.20pm we had a lone pilot whale diving and surfacing. This was the first time Chas had seen a single pilot whale in all his years of whale watching. We came up with lots of theories as to why it might be alone!

Seabirds were patchy; towards the beginning of the day we had seen a group of frigatebirds harassing mainly Sooty Terns while noddies, boobies and other terns were seen throughout the day, usually in large congregations with frigatebirds. One highlight was a single White-tailed Tropicbird circling close to a frigatebird.

As the afternoon closed in, we had the chance for a snorkel at 5pm at Wickham Bay; a welcome chance to cool off and enjoy some underwater life. We were dropped off by small tropical island, close to the mainland and a bay, and snorkelled over a wonderful reef full of hard and soft corals. There was a current which took us along and round the island; for some we got back in the tinnies and returned to the start to look at the reef in more detail. The water was incredibly warm in places. Highlights included a Whitetail Stingray, a Hookjaw Moray and a large Napoleon Wrasse, amongst many other now-familiar fish.

Once dried off we headed to the deck for 6pm snacks and the chance to see the sunset in the warm, open air. As it got dark Mars appeared in the night sky and several large owl-like fruit bats flew towards a small coconut tree island.

Day 9

Sunday 9th December

Solomon Sea, Kicha and Male Male

Waking up by a coconut topical islet, our pre-breakfast watch included three Black Ducks, a Common Kingfisher, four Moustached Treeswifts, an Eastern Great Egret and four Reef Herons. A few saw some Green Turtles surfacing too.

We headed off at 6.30am into the Solomon Sea where we did a big circular sail round for several hours; only 15 minutes later we had Spinner Dolphins just outside the lagoon where we had spent the night. Further on, at 7.20am we met a second group of Spinner Dolphins. The patterns and colours of the high pluming clouds were spectacular, and, on the horizon, we spotted a water spout, changing shape and finally disappearing. Although there was a swell, the sea's surface was very smooth and silky, ideal for spotting Dwarf Sperm Whales which look like upside down surfboards. We kicked off with three adults and a calf at 8.05am in 600metres depth of water before they quietly and discretely slipped under; their dark skin was glinting in the sunshine. At 9am we had another Dwarf Sperm Whale surfacing and a beaked whale doing the same before quickly disappearing. Further east another two surfacing Dwarf Sperm Whales were spotted.

At 10am we came to another tropical islet and went in for a welcome hour's snorkel at Kicha, a beautiful, broad coral garden, including lots of grass-green branching corals. There were familiar fish such as bird wrasse, parrotfish and bright blue fusilier fish, that became cryptic and regimented into a shoal at the first sign of danger. Highlights included a White-tip Reef Shark, a Green Turtle, Latticed Sand Perch and a Rock Mover Wrasse. During our snorkel and while drying off, the islet was busy with birds. There was a continuous flow of Imperial Island Pigeons to and from the island; there was no doubt a rich supply of fruiting trees on the island. A starling flew out with a fruit in its mouth. Shirley also spotted a rare Nicobar Pigeon fly over. While snorkelling many of us spotted two Sanford's Sea Eagles. An Eastern Osprey and a Beach Kingfisher was also seen.

We were on our way again just before 11.30am and almost immediately Chas spotted a Dwarf Sperm Whale at the surface. It was perfect conditions for this species today. From then onwards the Solomon Sea was very quiet; a Flesh-footed Shearwater flew past at just after midday. Numerous coconuts were floating on the sea; close up, each coconut has its own community of fishes beneath, using it as shelter.

After travelling across lots of sea without any further sightings, at 3.30pm we finally encountered some dolphins, Fraser's Dolphins and Melon-headed Whales – which are in fact dolphins, like pilot whales. For well over an hour we were able to observe these combined schools. Both species were swimming by the boat, although the Fraser's tended to stay a little further from the boat. After half an hour or so we headed out in the tinnies to get a closer look – Fernando, one of our dive guides - was capturing underwater footage of the animals with his Go Pro camera. Fernando and Pato dipped into the water holding onto the tinny to see how the dolphins reacted. They were relaxed so we headed back to the Bilikiki. Those who felt confident to be in the water quickly changed and we headed back out to snorkel with the dolphins. Despite the water being full of plankton and algae, those in the water glimpsed both species beneath the boat and to the side, as they surfaced and dived under. Throughout we could hear the dolphins communicating with distinctive squeaks or whistles. The Melon-headed Whales were much slower to surface, dark all over, with white lips, a round head and a taller dorsal fin compared to the Fraser's Dolphins. The Fraser's Dolphins were pink-bellied – one animal turned over to show off its pink belly. They were shorter, shorter-finned with a tapering typical dolphin head shape.

By 5.15pm we were back on the boat. Despite the falling light and the need to dock near a village community, Peava, in the light, five of us managed a 30-minute snorkel at Male Male, by a tropical islet. In the time we had we spotted a superb Hawksbill Turtle which stayed long enough for us to get a good view and Janice caught sight of a White-tip Reef Shark. Dark, black clouds finally reached us, and the tropical rain came down very heavy. With lightening in the background, we took the decision to head back to the Bilikiki. The rain continued for a short while longer and we returned back as everyone was chatting and relaxing with a beer.

At 7.15pm Chas gave a fascinating presentation on beaked whales, with incredible details and stories on the discoveries of the four species found in the Solomon Island, Cuvier's Beaked Whale, Blainville's Beaked Whale, Longman's Beaked Whale and Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale.

Day 10

Monday 10th December

Peava Village, Solomon Sea and Mbula Island

At first light there was a pair of Beach Kingfishers perching on nearby trees. Two Common Sandpipers were on the nearby jetty with a Willie Wagtail. A Common Kingfisher flew across the bay. After breakfast at 6am we

disembarked an hour later and headed to the shoreline where wooden sculptures were on display for us to buy. With sensible and polite bartering, we came away with some beautiful sculptures of dolphins, bat fish and other ornaments. Next door, Pato was busy buying fresh fruit and vegetables including limes which we had run out of for our fresh lime-juice water. John, our waiter on the boat, lives in this village and introduced some of us to his two children. He kindly showed us around and took us for a walk through some woodland, following the coastline, to his house (and a new one being built). Along the way we spotted an Eclectus Parrot, a Solomon Cockatoo, several Cardinal Lories, Olive-backed Sunbirds, Barred Cuckooshrikes, White-bellied Cuckooshrikes and two distant Buff-headed Coucals. We also managed to spot two Claret-breasted Fruit Doves with lovely green bodies and a red-pink breast. We also passed by several very loud cicadas and a medium-size crab climbing a small tree.

Once back on the Bilikiki we quickly changed and headed back out to snorkel at Male Male, where some of us had snorkelled last night. With the sunshine now on the reef, highlights included two White-tip Reef Sharks and a single Black-tip Reef Shark. By 10.30am we were back out and on our way into the Solomon Sea again to do a wide circle looking for cetaceans. Once again, the sea was smooth and silky: ideal conditions. At 11.35am we slowly closed in on a school of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins – there were over 40, no doubt many more. They were very relaxed, surfacing and moving around at ease. We spent half an hour with them as they were bow riding in crystal clear water giving ideal views of their white-tipped beak, spotting on older animals and their pale forehead. We took the opportunity to head out in the tinnies to get a little closer while Fernando captured them under water with his Go Pro, with success. We had the dolphins metres away at times, some leaping out of the water. Slowly but surely the dolphins carried on their way and it was time for our lunch at 12.30pm.

An hour later, we came across at least 40 Short-finned Pilot Whales which were logging and spyhopping at the surface. After watching them for a while, Chris deployed his drone and filmed some of the pilot whales from above. After it returned, we carried on watching them for a while and then headed back round towards Mbula Island, not before finding a few more Spotted Dolphins at 3.30pm, although they quickly disappeared. The sea was less smooth than earlier and at one point we passed tens of noddies, many sitting on the sea.

At 4.30pm we arrived at a sheltered spot on the north side of Mbula Canyon, Marovo Lagoon, for snorkelling and where we would overnight. At the briefing Pato told us this is one of the best and most intact reefs she has ever dived. And she was right – the reef was a huge garden of hard and soft corals. Many of the table and boulder corals were very large and no doubt very old. It was a beautiful sight and reassuring to us that there are still places in the world where reefs such as this remain untouched and in such a wonderful state. Amongst the reef there was a myriad of fish, most familiar faces from our other snorkel sites. Underwater the crackling or popping sound was that of pistol shrimps, a group of shrimps that make a crackling sound when their pincers snap shut. Above the water Blyth's Hornbills were busily perching and flying between trees and up to 10 were spotted. Their white tails, large, broad wings and thin long neck were very obvious. A Beach Kingfisher nosily called from the shore and above tens of Imperial Island Pigeons were flying all around or calling from the trees. Swiftlets were busily feeding above the canopies of the trees as the sun began to drop. The odd Olive-backed Sunbird was seen too. Heading back out of the water 80 minutes later we dried off ready for our 6pm snacks and a chance to enjoy this island's beauty at sunset.

The night sky was stunning tonight; with no artificial light, there were so many stars, including some very twinkly ones. After dinner Chas went for a quick night snorkel at the back of the boat and caught up with the Flashlight Fish in a cave below.

Day 11

Tuesday 11th December

Returning to Mborokua and Russell Islands

This morning the Bilikiki set off at just after 5.30am towards Mborokua Island and then on to the Russell Islands. For the first few hours the journey was quiet for cetaceans; frigatebirds, Brown Boobies and some terns were the main birds seen. However, at 9am, Captain Joe spotted a blow in the distance. As we headed forward it was clear there were two blows close to each other plus an even taller blow in the other direction. These were baleen whales, but which ones? Throughout the next two hours we had both distant and 'by the boat' views of the two smaller whales; over this time some of the group finally got some shots of the rostrum, the area in front of the blowhole, that revealed these were Bryde's Whales. They were in feeding mode, coming up from several breathes before going under again, although not usually for more than 10 minutes. The larger whale didn't reappear, and the blows of a fourth and fifth whale was seen in the far distance. By 11am things had gone quieter and the two smaller whales were diving for longer. So, we headed on to Mborokua Island where we stopped for lunch and a snorkel.

Before lunch some birding revealed two soaring Variable Goshawks, a hornbill, Imperial Island Pigeons, a Reef Heron and an Eastern Great Egret and the calls of Eclectus Parrots. We met for lunch at midday and then kitted up ready for a snorkel just off the coast of Mborokua Island at 1pm. The sun was shining bright and the visibility was excellent; we could see many metres down allowing us to see some of the larger fish living deeper. Sally spotted a shark and Ed showed some of the group a striking, if small, nudibranch. Large, colourful parrotfish graced the reefs. Carpets of Bulb-tentacle Sea Anemones were busy with numerous anemonefish brushing through their tentacles and defending their territories. Huge intact boulder and table corals looked stunning in the light, while large shoals of small fusiliers and chromis fish revealed how full of life this underwater landscape was.

At 2.30pm we were back on our way east towards the Russell Islands – there was a warm, refreshing breeze on the top deck and a choppy sea, although still good conditions for spotting whales. Over 100 Spotted Dolphins were seen at one point. As we headed north towards Karumolum Island in the Russell archipelago we encountered a small group of Spinner Dolphins that came to swim around the boat. We then sailed a short distance to our stopover for the night, positioned by a nearby village that we would be visiting in the morning. On reef marker posts a few Pacific Swallows and a species of tattler was perched; a Common Sandpiper flew past calling at dusk. We watched a beautiful sun setting over the forested islands.

At 7.15pm Ed gave a presentation about his research work on urban Peregrines; an insight into what he has discovered over the past 20 years. At the end of dinner, the crew sang and presented a colourful chocolate birthday cake to Janice, and which we all got to try a slice. Ed then did the checklist and people retired for the day.

Day 12

Wednesday 12th December

Russell Islands: Karumolum Island and Village Visit; Elephant Reef

We had barely woken up when the crew at the back of the Bilikiki excitedly yelled ‘whale’; surfacing close to the boat was a baleen whale. Over the next hour we watched as a female and a calf Omura’s Whale surfaced between feeds. This species was only discovered in 2003 and our sighting was the first of its kind on a wildlife tour and the first sighting here since 1976; the first now-known specimens were collected by Japanese whalers 42 years ago and it was only relatively recently that these were identified as Omura’s. After some time watching and photographing the pair, Chas was able to confirm their identification – they lacked any additional ridges, apart from a central one on their rostrum, and had a mottled, swirling skin pattern that other similar whales would not have. The calf did two breaches while we were watching, presumably to let its mother know where it was and to re-join her.

It was a really hot, humid day today. After a quick breakfast we headed out for a welcome cooling snorkel by the village and island of Karumolum. The chief, Raymond, looks after his community well and has stopped any fishing directly around the community’s island. The reefs we saw were beautiful and immaculate; in hot sunshine it was many people’s favourite snorkel – although each snorkel just kept getting better and better anyway! We had good views of Bat or Spade Fish too, one that some of the group got wooden sculptures of. Meanwhile, Sally, Shirley and Will had views of the whales alongside a school of Spinner Dolphins nearby. Common Terns, in moult, and very white Black-naped Terns had flown past earlier and rested on a nearby exposed reef at low tide. Three Common Sandpipers flew past and 20+ Pacific Swallows circled over the coconut trees. A small domestic pig was lying on the nearby beach, sunbathing!

We quickly changed and just after 9am headed across to the island to meet and be welcomed by Raymond. We were in for a treat: a chance to meet the community and see some traditional dancing and singing. We lined up in front of a line of children each holding a necklace of flowers; each came forward to give us a necklace as a gift. We were then shown to benches where we spent an hour enjoying the men performing several warrior dances and the women performing colourful dances. They then danced to pipes effectively producing musical sounds when hit at one end with the soles of flip-flops. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves and children, young people and adults across the generations were joining in. Halfway through we were each given a fresh coconut to drink from. And after Raymond took us for a tour through his village where 30 families and 226 people live. He showed us the church where people pray at 6am and 6pm, and some new boats being prepared from trunks of the Haw Haw tree. Around the village we spotted several Common Mynas, a few sunbirds and heard the calls of a few different pigeons. We said our farewells and thankyou and headed back to the Bilikiki.

Back on the boat we headed around the nearby lagoons encountering a school of Spinner Dolphins before heading out to sea. It was a flat calm, so ideal conditions for spotting whales! We headed out into deeper waters where it was around 1,000 metres deep. At 1.20pm Joe, the captain, spotted some splashes. Dolphins! However, they didn’t come rushing to the boat and had distinctive, pointed dorsal fins. We spent some time with them, although they were mainly keeping their distance – there were 15 – 20 at least. They were confirmed as Pygmy Killer Whales, a type of dolphin and similar in looks to the Melon-headed Whale, with a smaller dark cape and different pattern on the head. They are uncommon, even rare, and tend to dislike boats - unlike the Melon-headed - and eat much larger fish and smaller dolphins. We stayed with them until eventually they swam off into the distance.

After a heavy rain shower, the sea became calm again and Joe found a surfacing beaked whale, most likely a Blainville's. It surfaced six times or so before disappearing.

Just after 4pm we went for a snorkel at Elephant Reef, in the northern area of the Russell Islands. The reef itself was very shallow and we snorkelled further out just where it dropped many metres. There was more wildlife to be seen today and on this snorkel sea squirts were the highlight; they were abundant, particularly stone-brown coloured ones and larger yellow and purple heart-like ones. Anemonefish were always amongst any anemones, and where the deeper water became apparent, colourful fusilier fish were shoaling. In the darker caverns beneath the coral, soldierfish and squirrelfish, with large nocturnal eyes, were hiding and occasionally venturing out a short distance. At one point a few people saw a walking featherstar, using its feather-like appendages to move a little like a spider. The reef itself gets its name from the large elephant-ear-like corals that grow from three metres below and were easy to see. After an hour we headed back out and were graced by a small school of Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins as we headed back to the Bilikiki. Overhead, Common, Black-naped and Greater Crested Terns flew alongside Island Imperial Pigeons.

We sailed a little more into the lagoon area and anchored up for the night. After a very hot, humid day the temperature had dropped a little. We were able to enjoy the top deck with snacks and drinks against a quiet backdrop with Cardinal Lories flying overhead on their way to roost. Ian spotted three Moustached Treeswifts which looked cross-between a Swift and a Nightjar. A Beach Kingfisher noisily flew past too.

At 7.15pm Chas gave a presentation about the black fishes, the group of dolphins that include the pilot whales, the Pygmy Killer Whales, False Killer Whales and Killer Whales. We then had a delicious dinner, checklist and headed for bed, ready for our last day out on the Solomon Sea.

Day 13

Thursday 13th December

Lologhan Island (Russell Islands) and Guadalcanal; return to Honiara

This morning was cooler than yesterday's very humid day, and overcast; we sailed around the top of the Russell Islands at 6am heading to a snorkelling site for 7.30am. Close to a wooded atoll of Lologhan Island we snorkelled along a reef where on the most part the coral was healthy and colourful. In places the Crown-of-Thorns Sea Star has killed some of the coral; there had been some control measures on the sea star to reduce their impact. There was plenty of fish to see; this is a nursery ground for young fish. Amongst the coral the closed tubes of Common Vermetid Snails were very obvious; these snails produce a wide mucus net which captures marine detritus from the water and provides food for the snails. A Sharksucker fish was attracted to Fernando's fins. Sue and Chris found a Painted Spiny Lobster and Carey photographed a pair of stunning Blue-girdled Angelfish. Nearby, on the atoll itself two Eastern Ospreys and several Beach Kingfishers were hanging out.

We sailed east and south-east past Savo Island and then towards the coast of Guadalcanal where we stopped for a snorkel at 3pm. Just under the water, and by the shore, was a Japanese Ship, Hirokawu Maru, which was sunk during the Second World War on 15th November 1942. We were able to see some parts of the ship which had become covered in boulder corals since that time. This ship had become home to a whole host of new animals. We continued along the coast looking at a relatively young coral reef (still tens of years old); a contrast to the

mature and older reefs we had been seeing; further along there were lots of overlapping table corals. There were plenty of Spaghetti Worms alongside butterflyfish, small, sandy-coloured goatfish and fusiliers.

We carried on to Honiara, although not before heading back out to sea for a while and encountering a large group of over 100 Spotted Dolphins at 4.50pm. We stayed with them for a while; they must have known it was our last night. They were leaping out of the water on many occasions and really showing off. There was a few Spinner Dolphins amongst them too.

At 5.30pm we met together for some sparkling wine and a group photo, and the chance to say thank you to the boat crew and Pato and Fernando. As the light faded, we came into Honiara and stopped just before the harbour where we stayed for the night. It was very odd seeing an urban landscape. After a special dinner at 7pm and our last checklist, we headed for bed ready for disembarking in the morning.

Day 14

Friday 14th December

Honiara and disembarkation

We slowly rose for breakfast from 6am onwards, had breakfast and paid our bills before waiting to leave the Bilikiki at 8am. From the boat Pacific Swallows, Singing Starlings, a Beach Kingfisher and Glossy Swiftlets were flying around. We went to the nearby Mendana Hotel where we were able to relax for a few hours or go and explore more of Honiara. We were picked up at 11am and headed for the airport. At the airport, murals on the wall at departures depicted Solomon Island people in their traditional dance and warrior dress, just like we had seen for real the other day. Despite a delay we arrived back in Brisbane safely and said goodbyes to half the group who were continuing on their own adventures. The rest of us flew back to the UK via Dubai.

Day 15

Saturday 15th December

In Dubai we spotted the odd Laughing Dove, House Crow and House Sparrows. The flight back provided beautiful views of the mountains of northern Iraq and Turkey before we headed across the Black Sea, over Romania and continued on to a rainy, overcast, wintry London.

A huge thanks to the Bilikiki team who provided us with so much food, spectacular places and the chance to see some wonderful wildlife and landscapes. And thank you to Dr Chas Anderson for his cetacean expertise and enabling the Naturetrek tour to happen.



Reef Mbulo Canyon

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only; N=Near-endemic I=Introduced)

	Common name	Scientific name	December													
			3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
1	Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>				2			3							
2	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	<i>Ardenna pacifica</i>														
3	Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Ardenna carneipes</i>							1							
4	Eastern Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba modesta</i>				1	1		1		1					
5	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>			1	1				1						
6	Pacific Reef Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>				2	3+	2+	4	5	1	2				
7	Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>														
8	White-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>						1								
9	Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>														
10	Lesser Frigatebird	<i>Fregata ariel</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
11	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓			
12	Red-footed Booby	<i>Sula sula</i>						2+								
13	Eastern Osprey	<i>Pandion cristatus</i>	1	1	1	3	4+	1	1	1	1	1	4			
14	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>			2	4	4+	1			6	3	2	1		
15	Solomons or Sanford's Sea Eagle - N	<i>Haliaeetus sanfordi</i>		1		4	3+		2							
16	Pied Goshawk	<i>Accipiter albogularis</i>					1									
17	Variable Goshawk	<i>Accipiter hiogaster</i>									2					
18	Beach Stone-curlew	<i>Esacus magnirostris</i>				1			1							
19	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>							1							
20	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>							1							
21	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		1						2	1	3				
22	Tattler sp.	<i>Tringa sp.</i>									1	1				
23	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
24	Black Noddy	<i>Anous minutus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
25	White Tern	<i>Gygis alba</i>										6+				
26	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>		✓	✓	6+		✓	✓	✓			✓			
27	Spectacled Tern	<i>Onychoprion lunatus</i>														
28	Bridled Tern	<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓						
29	Sooty Tern	<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		2			

	Common name	Scientific name	December													
			3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
30	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
31	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓			
32	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		12+								✓				
33	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>														
34	Claret-breasted Fruit Dove	<i>Ptilinopus viridis</i>									2					
35	Island Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula pistrinaria</i>			✓	6+	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
36	Nicobar Pigeon	<i>Caloenas nicobarica</i>							1							
37	Channel-billed Coucal	<i>Scythrops novaehollandiae</i>									2					
38	Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	3			2	✓				✓	✓		✓		
39	Moustached Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne mystacea aeroplanes</i>				1				4			3			
40	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis salomonensis</i>								1	1					
41	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris alberti</i>			2						1					
42	Beach Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus saurophagus</i>				3		1	1	3	1	2	3	1		
43	Blyth's Hornbill	<i>Rhyticeros plicatus</i>					7+			10	3					
44	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>														
45	Solomon's Cockatoo - N	<i>Cacatua ducorpsii</i>		2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1		1				
46	Eclectus Parrot	<i>Eclectus roratus</i>					1			1	1					
47	Cardinal Lory	<i>Pseudeos cardinalis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	✓		
48	Coconut Lory	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus massena</i>		3		✓		✓		✓						
49	Barred Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina lineata</i>									2+					
50	White-bellied Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina papuensis perpallida</i>			1						✓					
51	Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	1		1						1		1			
52	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	✓	✓			3				2	2	20+	✓		
53	Singing Starling	<i>Aplonis cantoroides</i>	✓	✓									✓	✓		
54	Metallic Starling	<i>Aplonis metallica nitida</i>		✓							✓					
55	Starling sp.	<i>Aplonis sp.</i>				✓										
56	Long-tailed Myna	<i>Mino kreffti</i>		2	H		1									
57	Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓								4		✓		
58	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis flavigaster</i>		4+		1					✓		2+	✓		
59	Eurasian Tree Sparrow - I	<i>Passer montanus</i>												3		

	Common name	Scientific name	December											
			3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

Mammals

1	Rough-toothed Dolphin	<i>Steno bredanensis</i>		20+											
2	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	50+	40+		30+	✓		✓	✓	✓				
3	Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	100+												
4	Pantropical Spotted Dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>	100+		80+	30+		50+	100+		100+				
5	Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>				✓									
6	Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	40+								10				
7	Fraser's Dolphin	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>				✓	50+								
8	Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	6+												
9	Short-finned Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	20+	20+	40+	50+		40+							
10	Pygmy Killer Whale	<i>Feresa attenuata</i>									20+				
11	Melon-headed Whale	<i>Peponocephala electra</i>					40+								
12	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>				1			5						
13	Omura's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera omurai</i>									2				
14	Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>				4	9								
15	Blainville's Beaked Whale	<i>Mesoplodon densirostris</i>			8	3					1				
16	Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale or Longman's Beaked Whale	<i>Mesoplodon hotaula</i> or <i>Indopacitus pacificus</i>				3 to 5									
17	Unidentified beaked whale							1							

Reptiles

1	Hawksbill Turtle	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>						1							
2	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>					1	2							

Fish

Blue-spotted Stingray, *Neotrygon kuhlii*Whitetip Reef Shark, *Triaenodon obesus*Yellow-fin Tuna, *Thunnus albacares*Clown Anemonefish, *Amphiprion perucella*Pink Anemonefish, *Amphiprion perideraion*Whitetail Stingray, *Himantura granulata*Oceanic Manta, *Manta birostris*Sharksucker, *Echeneis naucrates*Red and Black Anemonefish, *Amphiprion melanopus*Orange-finned Anemonefish, *Amphiprion chrysopterus*Blacktip Reef Shark, *Carcharhinus melanopterus*Flying Fish, Family: *Exocoetidae*Clark's Anemonefish, *Amphiprion clarkii*White-bonnet Anemonefish, *Amphiprion leucohranos*Redfin Butterflyfish, *Chaetodon lunulatus*

Chevroned Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon trifascialis</i>	Eastern Triangular Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon baronessa</i>	Oval-spot Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon speculum</i>
Blacklip Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon kleinii</i>	Latticed Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon rafflesi</i>	Spot-nape Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon oxycephalus</i>
Eight-banded Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon octofasciatus</i>	Spot-banded Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon punctatofasciatus</i>	Meyer's Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon meyeri</i>
Teardrop Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon unimaculatus</i>	Pyramid Butterflyfish, <i>Hemitaurichthys polylepsis</i>	Ornate Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon ornatissimus</i>
Saddled Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon ephippium</i>	Pacific Double-saddle Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon ulietensis</i>	Eclipse Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon bennetti</i>
Dotted Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon semeion</i>	Vagabond Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon vagabundus</i>	Raccoon Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon lunula</i>
Dotted Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon semeion</i>	Threadthin Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon auriga</i>	Lined Butterflyfish, <i>Chaetodon lineolatus</i>
Longnose Butterflyfish, <i>Forcipiger flavissimus</i>	Pennant Bannerfish, <i>Heniochus chrysostomus</i>	Humphead Bannerfish, <i>Heniochus varius</i>
Singular Bannerfish, <i>Heniochus singularis</i>	Long-beaked Coralfish, <i>Chelmon rostratus</i>	Regal Angelfish, <i>Pygoplites diacanthus</i>
Greytail Angelfish, <i>Chaetodontoplus poliourus</i>	Bicolour Angelfish, <i>Centropyge bicolor</i>	Pearl-scaled Angelfish, <i>Centropyge vroliki</i>
Blue-girdled Angelfish, <i>Pomacanthus navarchus</i>	Vermiculated Angelfish, <i>Chaetodontoplus mesolucus</i>	Six-banded Angelfish, <i>Pomacanthus sextriatus</i>
Brushtail Tang, <i>Zebrasoma scopas</i>	Pacific Sailfin Tang, <i>Zebrasoma velifer</i>	Bluespine Unicornfish, <i>Naso unicornis</i>
Orangespine Unicornfish, <i>Naso lituratus</i>	Whitemargin Unicornfish, <i>Naso annulatus</i>	Bignose Unicornfish, <i>Naso vlamingii</i>
Moorish Idol, <i>Zanclus comutus</i>	Golden Spadefish, <i>Platax boersii</i>	Longfin Spadefish, <i>Platax teira</i>
Dusky Wrasse, <i>Halichoeres marginatus</i>	Bluestreak Cleaner Wrasse, <i>Labroides dimidiatus</i>	Richmond's Wrasse, <i>Halichoeres richmondi</i>
Tripletail Wrasse, <i>Chelinus trilobatus</i>	Pacific Bird Wrasse, <i>Gomphosus varius</i>	Chequerboard Wrasse, <i>Halichoeres hortulanus</i>
Five-finger Razorfish, <i>Iniistius pentadactylus</i>	Bridled Monocle Bream, <i>Scolopsis bilineatus</i>	Three-spot Dascyllus, <i>Dascyllus trimaculatus</i>
Hinged Shrimpfish, <i>Aeoliscus strigatus</i>	Crocodile Needlefish, <i>Tylasurus crocodilus</i>	Clouded Lizardfish, <i>Saurida nebulosa</i>
Blackeye Thicklip, <i>Hemigymnus melapterus</i>	Cornetfish, <i>Fistularia commersonii</i>	Spiny Chromis, <i>Acanthochromis polyacanthus</i>
Pale-tailed Chromis, <i>Chromis xanthera</i>	Blue-green Chromis, <i>Chromis viridis</i>	Black-axel Chromis, <i>Chromis atripectoralis</i>
Yellow-tailed Demoiselle, <i>Neopomacentrus azysron</i>	Coral Demoiselle, <i>Neopomacentrus nemurus</i>	Lemon Damsel, <i>Pomacentrus moluccensis</i>
Blue Damsel, <i>Pomacentrus pavo</i>	Staghorn Damsel, <i>Amblyglyphidodon curacao</i>	Surge Damsel, <i>Chrysiptera sp.</i>
Honeyhead Damsel, <i>Dischistodus prosopotaenia</i>	Steephead Parrotfish, <i>Chlorurus microrhinos</i>	Japanese Parrotfish, <i>Chlorurus japanensis</i>
Greensnout Parrotfish, <i>Scarus spinus</i>	Bridled Parrotfish, <i>Scarus frenatus</i>	Yellowfin Parrotfish, <i>Scarus flavipectoralis</i>
Red Parrotfish, <i>Scarus xanthopleura</i>	Swarthy Parrotfish, <i>Scarus niger</i>	Foxface Rabbitfish, <i>Siganus vulpinus</i>
Masked Rabbitfish, <i>Siganus puellus</i>	Redtooth Triggerfish, <i>Odonus niger</i>	Pink-tail Triggerfish, <i>Melichtys vidua</i>
Wedgetail Triggerfish, <i>Rhinecanthus rectangulus</i>	Titan Triggerfish, <i>Balistoides viridescens</i>	Orange-lined Triggerfish, <i>Balistapes undulatus</i>
Whitecheek Surgeonfish, <i>Acanthurus nigricans</i>	Mimic Surgeon Fish, <i>Acanthurus pyroferus</i>	Striped Surgeon Fish, <i>Acanthurus lineatus</i>
Ribbon Sweetlips, <i>Plectorhinchus polytaenia</i>	Brick Soldierfish, <i>Myripristis amaena</i>	Three-spot Squirrelfish, <i>Sargocentron comutum</i>
Bigscale Soldierfish, <i>Myripristis berndti</i>	Lined Bristletooth, <i>Ctenochaetus striatus</i>	Trumpetfish, <i>Aulostomus chinensis</i>

Black-spotted Puffer, *Arothron nigropunctatus*
 Arc-eye Hawkfish, *Paracirrhites arcatus*
 Flagtail Grouper, *Cephalopholis urodeta*
 Bluestreak Fusilier, *Pterocaesio tile*
 Golden Trevailley, *Gnathanodon speciosus*
 Midnight Snapper, *Macolor macularis*
 Two-spot Snapper, *Lutjanus biguttatus*
 Scorpionfish, *Scorpaenodes sp.*
 Purple Queen Anthias, *Pseudanthias pascalus*

Blue-spotted Puffer, *Arothron caeruleopunctatus*
 Hookjaw Moray, *Enchelycore bayeri*
 Honeycombe Grouper, *Epinephelus merra*
 Blue and Yellow Fusilier, *Caesio teres*
 Latticed Sandperch, *Parapercis clathrata*
 Five-line Snapper, *Lutjanus quinquelinatus*
 Humpback Snapper, *Lutjanus gibbus*
 Gold-saddle Goatfish, *Parupeneus sp.*

Twotone Dartfish, *Ptereleotris evides*
 Napoleon or Humphead Wrasse, *Cheilinus undulatus*
 Threestripe Fusilier, *Pterocaesio trilineata*
 Scissortail Fusilier, *Caesio caeruleaurea*
 Flashlight Fish, *Photoblepharon palpebratum*
 Black-banded Snapper, *Lutjanus semicinctus*
 Lionfish, *Pterois volitans*
 Blackcoral Blenny, *Ecsenius namiyei*

Sea Cucumbers

Panning's Black Sea Cucumber, *Actinopya palauensis*
 Graeffe's Sea Cucumber, *Pearsonothuria graeffei*

Sandfish Sea Cucumber, *Holothuria scabra*

Lollyfish Sea Cucumber, *Holothuria atra*

Sea Stars and Echinoderms

Blue Sea Star, *Linckia laevigata*
 Granular Sea Star, *Choriaster granulatus*
 Crown-of-Thorns Sea Star, *Acanthaster planci*
 Black Longspine Sea Urchin, *Diadema setosum*

Common Sea Star, *Asteria cepheus*
 Yellow Mesh Sea Star, *Nardoa novaecaledoniae*
 Cushion Star, *Culcita novaeguineae*

Multipore Sea Star, *Linckia multiflora*
 Brittle Star, *Ophiothrix nereidina*
 Rock Boring Urchin, *Echinometra mathaei*

Featherstars

Black Featherstar, *Comatella nigra*
 Thorny Featherstar, *Capillaster sentosus*
 Slender Featherstar, *Phanogenia gracilis*

Crevice Featherstar, *Comanthus parvicirrus*
 Bennett's Featherstar, *Oxycomanthus bennetti*

Saw-tooth Featherstar, *Oligometra serripinsa*
 Many-rayed Featherstar, *Capillaster multiradiatus*

Tunicates or Sea Squirts

Golden Ascidian, *Polycarpa aurata*

Lesser Urn Ascidian, *Atriolum robustum*

Nudibranchs

Loch's Chromodoris, *Chromodoris lochi*

Lined Phyllidia nudibranch, *Phyllidiea alyta*

Swollen Phyllidia nudibranch, *Phyllidiea varicosa*

Blue Dragon nudibranch, *Pteraeolidia ianthina*

Nudibranch, *Aegires minor*

Corals and Sponges

Elephant Ear Sponge, *Ianthella basta*

Boulder Coral, Order: *Scleractinia*

Massive Brain Coral, *Platygyra* sp.

Coral: Family Pocilloporidae, *Pocillopora* sp.

Plate Coral, *Fungia concinna*

Coral, Family: *Faviidae*

Blue sponge, *Haliclona* sp.

Leather Coral, *Sarcophyton* sp.

Soft Coral, *Sinularia* sp.

Stylophora pistillata

Helmet Plate Coral, *Ctenactis echinata*

Blue Coral, Family *Helioporidae*

Branching Fire Coral, *Millepora* sp.

Finger Leather Coral, *Sunularia* sp.

Tiered Table Coral, *Acropora hyacinthus*

Acropora sp.

Velvet Plate Coral, *Polyphlla talpina*

Anemones

Leathery Sea Anemone, *Heteractis crispa*

Branching Anemone, *Actinodendron arboreum*

Magnificent Sea Anemone, *Heteractis magnifera*

Tube Anemone, Family: *Cerianthidae*

Bulb-tentacle Sea Anemone, *Entacmaea quadricolor*

Molluscs

Fluted Giant Clam, *Tridacna squamosa*

Common Vermatid Snail, *Dendropoma maximus*

Octopus, *Octopus* sp.

Boring Giant Clam, *Tridacna crocea*

Tiger Cowrie, *Cypaea tigris*

Topshell: Common Trochus, *Tectus trochus*

Bigfin Reef Squid, *Sepioteuthis lessoniana*

Other invertebrates and algae

Zoanthids, Order: *Zoanthidea*

Peacock-tail Anemone Shrimp, *Periclimenes brevicarpalis*

Spaghetti Worm, *Terebellidae*

Sea Grapes, *Caulerpa racemosa*

Comb Jellies, Phylum: *Ctenophora*

Painted Spiny Lobster, *Panulirus versicolor*

Christmas Tree Worms, *Spirobranchus* sp.

Common Feather Duster Worm, *Sabellastarte sanctijosephi*

Sapphire Copepod, *Sapphirina* sp.

Feather Hydrozoans, *Lytocarpus philippinus*

Turtle Weed, *Chlorodesmis fastigiata*

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Warrior men dance - village visit



Women dancing - village visit