

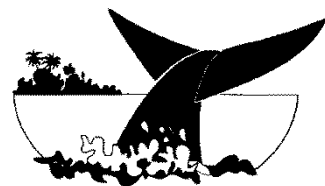
WHALE & DOLPHIN TRIP REPORT



Spinner Dolphin

MALDIVES EXPLORER CENTRAL ATOLLS CRUISE 19 to 30 November 2017

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TROPICAL DOLPHINS AND WHALES

MALDIVES EXPLORER

M.V. *Keana*, 19 to 30 Nov 2017

A wonderful cruise down to Thaa Atoll, in the southern central atolls. We enjoyed mostly excellent weather, with calm seas allowing many cetacean sightings, of 13 different species. There were many sightings of acrobatic Spinner Dolphins, totally over 2000 individuals, as well as great views of less common species including Blue Whales, Killer Whales, Pygmy Killer Whales, Fraser's Dolphins and Rough-toothed Dolphins. But cetacean highlight for many was our two sightings of Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale, a species that has only recently been scientifically recognised. We also enjoyed some wonderful snorkelling on a variety of coral reefs, including sheltered island reefs and exposed outer atoll rims. The colour and diversity of reef fishes was, as ever, extraordinary. But there were many larger creatures seen too, including Hawksbill Turtles, many Whitetip and Blacktip Reef Sharks, Manta and Mobula Rays, and several species of Stingray. In-water highlight for many was our dusk snorkel with dozens of Nurse Sharks. Among our other highlights: a wonderful Whale Shark encounter, a Leatherback Turtle, uninhabited islands, and a visit to the local fishing village of Veimandhoo. And all this from the comfort of our wonderful liveaboard vessel MV *Keana*, with her friendly and attentive crew.

Day 1, Sunday 19 Nov 2017

We all met at the International Airport, and were soon transferred to our home for the next 12 days, MV *Keana*. Once we were all on board there was an orientation and safety briefing, time to get settled into cabins, and then we were off. A **Green Turtle** was spotted as we left the anchorage heading out onto the flat calm sea.

In such conditions it did not take long for our first sighting: a **Dwarf Sperm Whale** logging quietly at the surface. It was some way off, and as we watched two more appeared. Then as we moved on, another two **Dwarf Sperm Whales** were spotted ahead. They were swiftly followed by a sighting of two **Beaked Whales**, showing their characteristic rolling motion at the surface. Not long afterwards there were more **Dwarf Sperm Whales** with 5 or 6 in one small area, at which point another **Beaked Whale** (possibly a young Cuvier's Beaked Whale) surfaced just astern of us.

This was a great start, and there were some nice birds too, including **Great Crested Tern**, **Saunders Tern**, **Black-naped Tern**, and, as we came in towards our anchorage, **Maldivian House Crow**.

Once anchored it was into the *dhoni* for our first snorkel, on the nearby reef. The light was fading and the corals were not the best, but it was wonderful to cool down in the water and enjoy the great diversity of fishes, including schools of **Barracuda** and **Little Tuna**, **Maldivian Anemonefish**, **Unicornfish**, **Moorish Idol** and much more.

Day 2, Monday 20 Nov 2017

What a fantastic day! It was calm first thing, and stayed calm all day. Those who were up early enjoyed sightings of **Spinner Dolphins** entering the reef channel, and a pair of **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** swimming slowly behind the anchored boat. For the rest, there were more dolphins as we headed out on the *dhoni* for our morning snorkel. A large

school of **Spinner Dolphins** was swimming in through the channel, and readily bowrode in numbers as we travelled with them, with several spinning too. Leaving the dolphins we made to the reef for our snorkel. In the bright morning light and with minimal current we enjoyed a gorgeously gentle wander along the reef edge. Highlights included great schools of **Blue** and **Neon-streaked Fusiliers**, swarms of **Silver Sprats**, **White-lined lionfish** and a **Hawksbill Turtle**.

Back on board *Keana*, breakfast was ready, and then we were off. We were soon out in the deep ocean water, and it was not long before we spotted four beaked whales. They dived, but we approached the spot where they had disappeared and settled down to wait. 26 minutes later they popped up, not far off the side of the boat. We could clearly see their sloping heads as they surfaced to breathe, which made us think they must be Cuvier's Beaked Whales. They dived again, and we waited again. 22 minutes later, they reappeared. Again we could see the sloping head, and one animal that appeared to have paler fore-parts and white scratches: a presumed male. When they dived again we prepared to leave, but a review of Jim's photos showed an individual with a beak in front of the sloping head. These could not be Cuvier's after all. We waited for another viewing. This time we confirmed the longer than expected beaks, and the dark charcoal (rather than rich chocolate) colouration.



Deraniyagala's Beaked Whales

These were **Deraniyagala's Beaked Whales**, a species only recognised in 2014, and never

knowingly identified at sea before! Wow! After they dived again we waited a further 45 minutes, but this time we did not see them again. But no matter, this had been a quite extraordinary encounter. And besides, lunch was ready!

As we continued our way southwards we could see two Maldivian tuna fishing boats ahead. They were fishing for **Yellowfin Tuna** and were accompanied by an enormous mixed school of **Spinner Dolphins** and **Spotted Dolphins**. Both species readily bowrode, giving excellent views and photo opportunities.

This mixed school was quite a spectacle, but we eventually moved on. As we approached Vaavu Atoll, some fins were spotted ahead. These animals seemed a bit shy, and it was not immediately obvious what species we were looking at. But it eventually became clear that these were **Pygmy Killer Whales**. For the most part they kept slowly moving away from the boat, but at one point 3-4 approached the bows underwater, clearly showing their bulbous heads and white lips.



Pygmy Killer Whales

Not long after this we were anchored near Fotheyo sandbank and were soon all on the *dhoni* for our evening snorkel. We visited the inner reef near the sandbank, where there were scattered coral blocks on the sand. The many nice fish here included **Giant Moray Eel** and numerous species of **Damselfish**, as well as **Sea Cucumbers** and **Featherstars**. And towards the end of our snorkel, with the sun

setting, **Spinner Dolphins** swam by towards the channel.

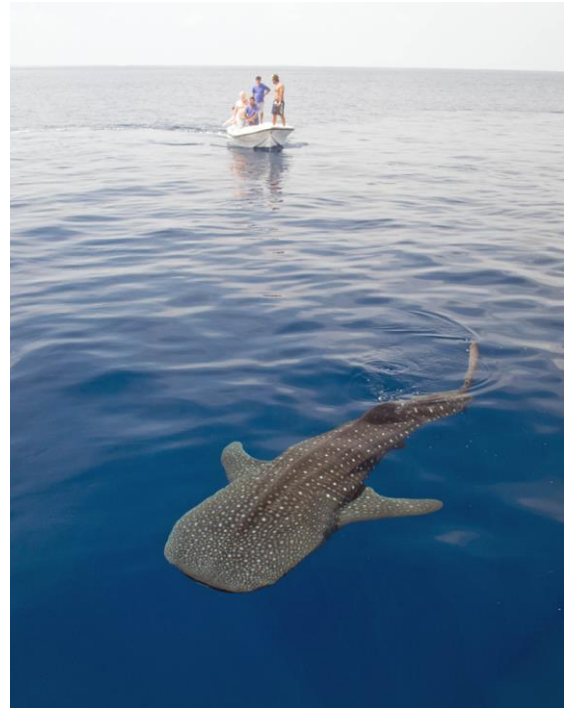
Evening slide show: Beaked Whales, on the top deck. Followed by dinner and then fish and plankton spotting off the stern fishing platform (including **Nurse Shark**, **Whiptail Stingray**, **Dogtooth Tuna**, larval **Mantis Shrimps** and **Crabs**, **Sea Skaters**, many small fish and other plankton).

Day 3, Tues 21 November

There were **Spinner Dolphins** coming in through the nearby channel early today, and we met up with them when we went out on the *dhoni* for our morning snorkel. There were over 200, all around our boat, bowriding and spinning alongside. And our snorkel on the channel reef was also a delight. There was a slight in-current, bringing clear blue oceanic water which drifted us slowly along the sunlit reef. In the shallows were swarms of **Silver Sprats**, there were **Garden Eels** on the sandy slopes, while in deeper water different people spotted a **Mobula Ray**, **Spotted Eagle Ray**, **Fantail Stingray** and **Whitetip Reef Shark**. In short, a fabulous snorkel.

Back on board *Keana* breakfast was ready, and then we were off, out into the ocean. In no time at all we had a sighting of a **Beaked Whale**, but despite waiting we did not see it again. Soon afterwards we spotted another pair of **Beaked Whales**. We spotted them again when they resurfaced after 27 minutes, but then they disappeared for good. This seemed like more typical Beaked Whale behaviour than the superb encounter we had enjoyed yesterday! But all was far from lost, because while waiting we had a sighting of a massive **Leatherback Turtle** which surfaced to breath nearby. And soon after moving on, a tailfin was sighted (well spotted Paul). At first it appeared to be a Sailfish, but as we slowly approached it turned towards us, and we could see that it was a **Whale Shark**. It was a youngster, perhaps 4m long, and seemed

almost as interested in us as we were in it. Because it stayed with us, moving around the boat several times allowing everyone great views, and also permitting close approach by the dingy. Fantastic!



Whale Shark

It was now lunchtime, and things quietened down for a while, although we did see some nice seabirds including **Sooty**, **Common** and **Saunders's Terns**. And then as we approached Meemu Atoll the cetacean sightings picked up again. There were **Dwarf Sperm Whales**, a mother and calf Beaked Whale (which again we at first thought were Cuvier's, but on later inspection of photos decided were **Deraniyagala's Beaked Whales**) and a frisky school of **Spinner Dolphins** heading out for the night.

We anchored in a sheltered spot opposite Maduveri Island, and were soon into the *dhoni* and heading for the nearby reef for our evening snorkel. The water was not the clearest, but the fishlife was superb. An immense school of **Hunchback Red Snappers** carpeted swathes of the reef, while other fishy highlights included **Oriental**

Sweetlips, Dogtooth Tuna and Rockmover Wrasse. Among the more notable invertebrates: **Octopus, Cushion Star** and spawning **Sea Cucumbers**. As the sun set over the mirror-calm sea we climbed **back** on board our *dhoni* and returned to the *Keana* for warm showers swiftly followed by cold drinks.

Evening talk: Dolphins of the Maldives. With plenty of fish (including a **Banded Snake Eel**) and plankton on show after dinner off the stern fishing platform.

Day 4, Wed 22 November

Another fantastic day! We set off early, with flat calm seas, having already seen **Spinner Dolphins** swimming in through the channel. Once outside in the ocean it was not long before our first cetacean sighting: a small group of **Risso's Dolphins**. They were mostly greys, but there were also a couple of scratched, white individuals too. This sighting was soon followed by a glimpse of a **Beaked Whale**, but although we waited 40 minutes we did not see it resurface. However, very soon after moving on cetaceans were spotted just ahead. And not just any cetaceans, but **Killer Whales**.



Killer Whales

There were 5 of them, travelling resolutely northwards, and we turned to go with them. A couple of times they came right up to our vessel, swimming alongside and underneath, and inspecting our dingy being towed behind. When they were so close their immense bulk

and power were very apparent. At other times they swam parallel to us, giving excellent views. They appeared to be four mature females and one juvenile.

Eventually we left the Orcas, and turned back towards Meemu Atoll. We passed a large school of **Spinner Dolphins** swimming very close to the outer reef before we stopped for our late morning snorkel. This was on the outer reef, in clear oceanic water, with a slight swell. In the surge zone were many of the expected fish species: **Zebra Torpedo Goby, Five-lined Wrasse, Jansen's Wrasse, Surge Damsel** and **Surge Hawkfish**. There were also **White-tailed Stingrays** in the reef gutters, **Black-tip Reef Sharks** patrolling in very shallow water, and **Giant Trevallies** a bit further out. Plus several **Hawksbill Turtles**. Fabulous!

Back on board, there was just time to shower and change, and almost immediately cetaceans were spotted ahead. These turned out to be an enormous mixed school of **Pilot Whales, Common Bottlenose Dolphins, Fraser's Dolphins** and **Rough-toothed Dolphins**. We spent well over 1½ hours with this group, and for long stretches of that time had both Pilot Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins bowriding together. Meanwhile the Fraser's Dolphins stayed in a tight herd, mostly off to one side, while the Rough-toothed Dolphins appeared alongside from time to time. The whole assemblage was spread out across about a mile of ocean, providing the most amazing spectacle.



Rough-toothed Dolphins

After a very late lunch, we moved on, and into Meemu Atoll, passing **Spinner Dolphins** in the channel. There were also **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** as we headed across the Atoll towards our anchorage, our eighth confirmed species for the day (nine if we include the unidentified Beaked Whales this morning). We anchored near Kolhufushi, at the southern end of Meemu Atoll, and were soon into the *dhoni* for our evening snorkel on the nearby reef. The water was green and rather murky, but it was a great snorkel, with lots of interesting fish including **Blacktip Reef Shark**, **Stonefish**, **White-lined Lionfish**, a huge school of mating **Convict Surgeonfish**, and a **Manta Ray** seen by Paul. We were back on board just as the sun set.

Evening talk: Blackfish of Maldives.



Spinner Dolphin bow-riding

Day 5, Thurs 23 November

Another early start and another superb day for marine wildlife. As we left our anchorage in Meemu Atoll there were two large groups of **Spinner Dolphins** coming into the atoll. The first was rather subdued, but the second was happy to bowride.

The crossing to Thaa Atoll was quiet, but once across things picked up a lot. First up a group of **Risso's Dolphins**, which not only gave us a view of their raised tails, but also rode alongside *Keana* for some distance.

When we left the Risso's we headed in towards the atoll for our late morning snorkel on the outer reef near Vilufushi. There was

only a moderate swell breaking in the shallows over the deep spur-and-groove formations. In the shallows were many of the surge specialists we had seen yesterday, but also **Surf Surgeonfish** and **Queenfish**. In slightly deeper water over the reef slope were **Hawksbill Turtles**, **Napoleon Wrasse**, **Giant Moray**, **Whitetip Reef Shark**, **White-tailed Stingray**, **Spotted Eaglerays** and a small school of **Mobula Rays**.



Mobula Rays



White-tailed Stingray, *Himantura granulata*

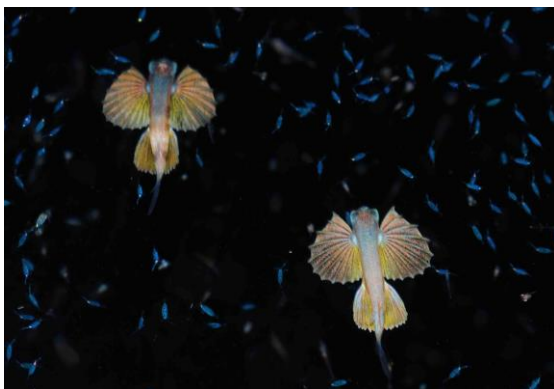
Once we were all back on board *Keana* we continued our progress southwards. And almost immediately splashing was spotted ahead. This proved to be coming from a large school of **Bottlenose Dolphins**. Then three **Pilot Whales** were spotted to one side, and we spent some time travelling with them (including during lunch). Three Pilot Whales on their own is a bit unusual, so it was not a surprise when they eventually led us to about 20 more **Pilot Whales**, spread out over a wide area in two groups. While watching one of those, a large area of splashing was seen about

1km away, but coming steadily closer. It looked like a school of **Fraser's Dolphins**, and sure enough it was. They too were heading south, and we spent over an hour with them, with up to 30 attempting to bowride at a time.

Finally leaving this great aggregation of cetaceans, we pressed on into the Veimandhoo Channel, south of Thaa Atoll. But no more cetaceans were seen until we turned into the atoll near Guraidhoo island, where a large group of **Spinner Dolphins** was heading out to sea for its night's feeding. We turned to go with them, and soon had many bowriding. But they were heading out and we needed to head in, so we eventually left them and turned back into the atoll.

We anchored off Kalhufahalafushi, at 4 miles in length the longest island in the Maldives. Most took the chance to go ashore for a walk. Among the birds seen: **Maldivian Little Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Common Sandpiper** and a **Snipe** (either Common or Pintail). For those who chose to remain on board there was plenty of time to enjoy the sunset with a cold drink.

Evening activity: Plankton and baby Flying-fish spotting off the stern fishing platform



Baby Flying-fish

Day 6, Friday 24 November

After so many perfect days it was almost inevitable that we should have a day that was not quite so good. And today was it! It had

rained heavily in the night, and it was still quite windy first thing, with a stiff breeze from the west. So we headed out of the atoll for our morning snorkel, on the outer reef in the shelter of Madifushi island, where an in-bound school of **Spinner Dolphins** swam by just before we jumped in. In the shallows was the usual selection of surge-zone fishes. There were also several **Hawksbill Turtles** and **Reef Octopuses**, many large **Rock Lobsters** under one particular bommie, and a passing **Manta**.

Back on board *Keana* we showered and had breakfast before moving off into the deep Veimandhoo Channel. Conditions were ideal, with a calm sea and good lighting. But there were no cetaceans to be seen, and a huge black storm was developing astern. The storm eventually caught up with us at midday, with rain and increased wind. We turned in towards the atoll, planning to anchor in a sheltered spot for lunch. On our way in we passed the wreck of a tug and its barge on the outer reef of Fonadhoo Island (a reminder of the potential dangers of the sea), before anchoring near to Veimandhoo Island.

After lunch we headed off in the *dhoni* for our afternoon snorkel, on the reef of Kanimeedhoo Island. With a slight incoming current bringing clear blue water it was a delightful gentle drift along the reef. A feeding **Hawksbill Turtle** greeted us as we jumped in. There were also sightings of **Grey Reef Shark**, and many reef fishes, including great schools of **Yellow Goatfish**.

At 5pm we were off again on the *dhoni*, this time for a walk ashore on Veimandhoo. This was a chance to stretch the legs, and to see something of a traditional Maldivian island. The village was well vegetated, with plenty of breadfruit and other fruit trees. There were also many migratory dragonflies, mostly **Globe Skimmers**, and a small boy trying to catch them with a traditional lime stick (using breadfruit sap glue). Birds spotted included **Asian Koel** and **Maldivian Little Heron**.

Evening talk: Whales of Maldives. And after dinner, there was a pair of **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** feeding around the boat.

Day 7, Sat 25 November

We started today with a snorkel on the channel reef of Veimandhoo Island. The water varied from very clear to rather murky, and the corals were not great, but once again the fishlife was superb. Highlight for many was undoubtedly a single **Lattice Butterflyfish** (*Chaetodon rafflesi*), only the second record for the Maldives. Other highlights included **Octopus** and **Hawksbill Turtle**.

Keana set off as we finished breakfast. There was a slight breeze but the sea was not choppy, so we had high hopes. But we did not have a single cetacean sighting all morning. However, just after midday we came across a large school of about 25 **Pilot Whales**, all heading very slowly south. There were five in one subgroup, which was visited by a **Tropical Shearwater**, and at least 19 in another subgroup, where there were also a couple of **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**. The Pilots were very relaxed, and seemed happy to approach our bows time after time, giving excellent views. We spent well over an hour with the Pilot Whales before succumbing to a late lunch and heading back on course.



Pilot Whale, spy-hopping

We reached the tiny, uninhabited island of Kandufushi at 1600h, with plenty of time for a walk ashore or a snorkel. For those who went

onto the island, there were sightings of **Maldivian Little Heron**, **Grey Heron**, **House Crow** and **Common Sandpiper**, as well as **Maldivian Fruit Bat**. There were also plenty of dragonflies, of three species (*Pantala flavescens*, *Tramea limbata* and *Tramea basilaris*). For those who went snorkelling there was another bonanza of reef fishes. Indeed, this was so much so that several snorkelers were even more reluctant than usual to return to the boat. But time was pressing, the sun was getting low, and we had plans for a night snorkel. We returned to the island reef on the *dhoni*, just as the sun set (with a small school of **Spinner Dolphins** heading out), and were immediately back in the water. Within 20 minutes it was completely dark underwater, and the day fishes had been replaced by the night shift: numerous **Soldierfishes**, plus **Squirrelfishes**, **Cardinalfishes** and **White-lined Lionfish**. There was also a multitude of **Slate-pencil Urchins** emerging from their daytime retreats, a couple of **Tiger Cowries** and a most unusual **sea cucumber**.

After dinner, off the stern platform, the many small fishes attracted by the boat's lights were joined by two types of jellyfish: *Aurelia* and some impressive **Cubomedusans**. And later still there was a small fall of **migratory dragonflies** onto the boat, attracted by the lights. For more on this topic, see:

www.ted.com/talks/charles_anderson_discovers_dragonflies_that_cross_oceans



Moon Jellyfish, *Aurelia maldivensis*

Day 8, Sun 26 November

For those who were up early enough, there had been a ship-fall of **dragonflies** during the night. There were dozens on board, roosting on the wooden ceiling slats. Most were **Globe Skimmers**, but there were several **Indian Emperors** as well, four of which caught Globe Skimmers on the wing, landed back on board and ate them whole, starting at the head and leaving just the wings and legs.

At 0700h, as we left *Keana* for the island of Kandufushi, the sea was so calm that we could clearly see a distant school of **Spinner Dolphins** entering the atoll after their night out at sea. Some chose to go ashore in the dingy, others chose to snorkel on the house reef from the *dhoni*. There were plenty more **dragonflies** on the island, as well as a particularly handsome giant **Hermit Crab** and a couple of **Maldivian Little Herons**. While for the snorkelers there were plenty more colourful reef fishes.

As we set off from our anchorage, we had a distant sighting of two **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins**. Out at sea the calm conditions promised great sightings, but there was precious little about. We did have a glimpse of a **Dwarf Sperm Whale** and of a juvenile gull (probably a second year **Heuglin's Gull**). And there were good sightings of **Sooty Tern**, **Saunders Tern** and jumping **Yellowfin Tuna**. But that was about all until just before we turned in to Faafu Atoll, when we came up upon a large school of **Pilot Whales**. There were **Common Bottlenose Dolphins** too, and a couple of times we had both species on the bows together. Fabulous!

Once anchored we piled onto the *dhoni* for our evening snorkel on a nearby reef. The coral structure was amazing and as ever the fish life was entrancing. Also on this reef were many spawning **red starfishes** (*Fromia indica*).

Evening talk: the Maldivian seasons, on the top deck under the half-moon. And at dinner, a **Hawkmoth** was spotted resting on board.



Spawning Starfish, *Fromia indica*

Day 9, Monday 27 November

We started with a short *dhoni* ride to Minimasgali Island. Some went ashore, where there were **dragonflies** and **moths**, and a selection of birds (including **Greenshank**, **White-breasted Waterhen** and **Asian Koel**). Others opted for a full hour of snorkelling, which produced a feeding **White-spotted Eagle-ray**, **Giant Moray**, plenty of **Maldivian Anemonefish**, **Napoleon Wrasse**, and a particularly good selection of massive corals (*Porites*).

We headed north from Minimasgali, into the deep Ariyadhoo Channel, and within just a few minutes found two **Blue Whales** (well spotted Lisa!). They appeared to be travelling west, in the exact opposite of the way we were heading, so we turned and went with them. They were well separated, but diving synchronously for 12-18 minutes at a time. This did not make tracking easy, but we managed to keep with them, and had excellent views of both animals. One had a much more prominent dorsal fin than the other (so much so that before we got close we were speculating that it might be a different species) and was heavily covered with **Whale Remoras**. After spending 1½ hours with the

whales we reluctantly left them and turned back on course.

After that excitement, our crossing to Vaavu Atoll was mostly quiet. But we did find one large school of **Spinner Dolphins** heading westwards between the atolls (well spotted Paul), which readily bowrode. And a second group of **Spinner Dolphins** heading out to sea just before we entered Vaavu Atoll (Bev!).

We finally anchored next to the tiny uninhabited island of Anbara, and were soon on to the *dhoni* for our afternoon snorkel. The reef here was a delight, with a steep drop-off, plenty of live corals, a large **Hawksbill Turtle**, **Stonefish**, as well as several **Lionfishes** and many **Featherstars** emerging in the dusk.

Evening talk: Atolls and atoll formation, on the top deck



Spotfin Lionfish, *Pterois antennata*

Day 10, Tues 28 November

We left our anchorage at Anbara early this morning, looking forward to a full day of cetacean watching. But the weather was against us. A storm was developing, bringing wind and rain, and terrible viewing conditions. Despite transiting some of the best cetacean territory in the Maldives we had only a glimpse of a single medium-sized blow. There were a lot more seabirds than we had been

seeing, including hundreds of **Lesser Noddies**, as well as smaller numbers of **Brown Noddy**, **Saunders Terns**, **Common Tern**, **Lesser Crested Tern** and a solitary **Tropical Shearwater**. But cetaceans were not to be found. As a result of which we arrived at our planned anchored well ahead of schedule, and with time for a mid-afternoon snorkel on the outer reef. This proved to be an excellent site, with many nice *Porites* corals on the gently shelving shallow reef and a steep, undercut dropoff, with schools of **Anthias** and **Fusiliers** all along the edge. There were bigger animals too, with sightings of **Fantail Stingray**, **Blacktip Reef Shark**, **Nurse Shark** and **Hawksbill Turtle**.



Hawksbill Turtle

We did not have long back on *Keana* (although long enough to enjoy afternoon tea) before setting off on the *dhoni* again, for our evening snorkel. This was on the house reef of Alimatha resort island. This site is renowned for its sunset shark action, and we were definitely not disappointed. As soon as we jumped in three big **Nurse Sharks** appeared underneath us. Then a squadron of another nine **Nurse Sharks** glided by, with more visible off in the wings. Wow! As we drifted slowly down towards the jetty more and more **Nurse Sharks** appeared, as well as **Blacktip Reef Sharks**, **Whiptail Stingrays** and **Spotted Eagle-rays**. A world-class snorkel! And when we returned to the main boat there

were three more Nurse Sharks patrolling under the stern. Fantastic!

Evening presentation: Trip video by Alex.



Nurse Shark

Day 11, Wednesday 29 November

Our day started with a morning snorkel on the outer reef north of Alimatha. The sea was calm and under the bright sunlight the reef looked wonderful. There were particularly good numbers of *Porites* and *Pocillopora* corals, and the fishlife as ever was a delight. Along the reef dropoff were schools of plankton feeders including **Fusiliers**, **Black-pyramid Butterflyfish**, **Anthias**, **Sergeant Majors** and **Red-toothed Triggerfishes**. There were also **Hawksbill Turtles** and several large **Moray Eels**. And after we returned to the main boat, a large **Manta Ray** was seen at the surface, swimming down the side of the boat.

As we came out from our snorkel we had seen a dozen tuna fishing boats offshore. So once back on board *Keana* we set off immediately to see what they were up to. They turned out to be fishing for **Yellowfin Tuna** (using traditional handlines), in the company of

Spotted Dolphins. And as we watched a large group of **Spinner Dolphins** swam in from offshore to join them.

We pressed on, across the deep Fulidhoo Channel, unfortunately without any cetacean sightings. But on the other side Mike did spot dolphins (almost certainly **Spotted Dolphins**) jumping next to a Yellowfin Tuna fishing boat. However, we were on track for our late morning snorkel on the outer reef of South Malé Atoll, so did not divert to investigate this time. The snorkel itself was a delight. Once again there were good numbers of corals and plentiful fishlife, especially in the shallows. Among the bigger animals seen were several **Blacktip Reef Sharks**, **Whitetip Reef Sharks** and the tail of a sleeping **Nurse Shark**.

After this we continued northwards towards the island metropolis of Malé, the international airport and our anchorage at Hulumalé. Just before we turned in, a final large school of Spinner Dolphins appeared and bowrode, before continuing out for the night.

Evening presentation: Trip recap and talk on corals

Day 12, Thursday 17 November

After breakfast there were sad farewells and two transfers to the airport by *dhoni* at different times. The wind had picked up in the night, making for rather bumpy crossings (as a result, we found out later, of the brewing tropical storm Ockhi, up in the Arabian Sea).

CETACEAN SUMMARY

During our cruise we recorded an excellent total of 13 different species, from 55 sightings (which made 63 records since two or more species were seen together on several occasions):

Species	Scientific Name	No. Sightings	Est. no. Individuals
Spinner Dolphins	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	23	2014
Spotted Dolphins	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>	2	350
Risso's Dolphins	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	2	30
Common Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	4	174
Indopacific Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	4	8
Fraser's Dolphin	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>	2	160
Rough-toothed Dolphin	<i>Steno bredanensis</i>	1	25
Shortfin Pilot Whales	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	4	155
Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>	1	5
Pygmy Killer Whale	<i>Feresa attenuata</i>	1	25
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>	7	15
Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale	<i>Mesoplodon hotaula</i>	2	6
Unidentified Beaked Whale	Ziphiidae	6	8
Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	1	2
Unidentified cetaceans		3	8
		63	2985



Common Bottlenose Dolphin



Fraser's Dolphins

BIRDS

Maldives does not have a great diversity of birds, so our total of just 18 species seen in November is not unexpected:

1	Tropical Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bailloni</i>
2	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
3	Maldivian Little Heron	<i>Butorides striata didii</i>
4	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
5	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
6	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
7	Snipe	<i>Gallinago</i> sp.
8	Probable Heuglin's Gull	<i>Larus heuglini</i>
9	Saunders's Tern	<i>Sterna saundersi</i>
10	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
11	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>
12	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
13	Great Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>
14	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
15	Lesser Noddy	<i>Anous tenuirostris</i>
16	Sooty Tern	<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>
17	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
18	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens maledivicus</i>

ANCHORAGES

Day 1	19 Nov 2017	Guraidhoo	South Malé Atoll
Day 2	20 Nov 2017	Fotheyo	(Vaavu Atoll)
Day 3	21 Nov 2017	Maduvveri	(Meemu Atoll)
Day 4	22 Nov 2017	Kolhufushi	(Meemu Atoll)
Day 5	23 Nov 2017	Kalufahalafushi	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 6	24 Nov 2017	Veimmandoo	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 7	25 Nov 2017	Kandufushi	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 8	26 Nov 2017	Minimasgali	(Faafu Atoll)
Day 9	27 Nov 2017	Anbara	(Vaavu Atoll)
Day 10	28 Nov 2017	Alimatha	(Vaavu Atoll)
Day 11	29 Nov 2017	Hulumalé	(North Malé Atoll)
Day 12	30 Nov 2017	Disembark	

CONTACT DETAILS

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