

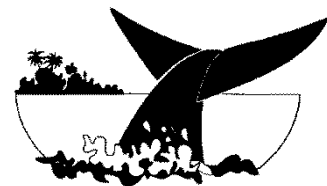
WHALE & DOLPHIN TRIP REPORT



Shortfin Pilot Whales

MALDIVES EXPLORER CENTRAL ATOLLS WILDLIFE CRUISE 14 to 24 October 2018

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TROPICAL DOLPHINS AND WHALES

MALDIVES EXPLORER

M.V. *Keana*, 14-24 Oct 2018

This was a glorious wildlife cruise through the south-central atolls of the Maldives, during which we enjoyed calm weather, a cornucopia of cetacean sightings and splendid snorkelling. We were blessed with calm seas from the very start, enjoying perfect viewing conditions for day after day. As a result we had a particularly rich crop of cetacean sightings, of 13 different species. Among the many highlights: hundreds of Spinner Dolphins, Spotted Dolphins, Fraser's Dolphins and Pilot Whales; not one but two encounters with Killer Whales; clear views of three species of Beaked Whale (Cuvier's, Blainville's and Deraniyagala's); and dozens of Dwarf Sperm Whales. We had some nice seabird sightings too, including White-tailed Tropicbird, Bulwer's Petrel and Flesh-footed Shearwater. The snorkelling, as ever, was wonderful with a huge diversity of colourful reef fishes; Manta Rays, Mobula Rays, Stingrays, Eagle Rays; Whitetip Reef Shark, Blacktip Reef Shark, Grey Reef Shark and Nurse Shark; Reef Squid, Octopus, and Turtles. All from the comfort and safety of M.V. *Keana*.

Day 1, Sunday 14 Oct 2018

We all met at the International Airport, some flying in this morning, others transferring from nearby hotels or resorts, with one lucky participant spotting a Beaked Whale during his transfer! Once we were all together it was onto the *dhoni* and we were soon transferred to our home for the next 11 days, MV *Keana*. After an orientation and safety briefing, there was time to get settled into cabins, and then we were off.

Lunch was served soon after departure, and just after that a **Dwarf Sperm Whale** logging quietly at the surface was spotted (well done Tim!). Today was sunny and the sea was calm, and in such calm conditions it was not surprising that this was our first sighting. Dwarf Sperm Whales are common in Maldives but almost impossible to spot in any but the calmest seas. This first animal soon dived, soon enough another two **Dwarf Sperm Whales** appeared.

Some splashing ahead then attracted our attentions and turned out to be a small school of medium-large (1m+) **Yellowfin Tuna**. They must have been particularly abundant in the area today, because we had sightings of two

more schools in quick succession. These were followed by some rather more substantial splashing closer to the islands: this time coming from a large and very active school of **Spinner Dolphins**. They leapt, they span, they bowrode, they kept us enthralled until it was time to move on towards our anchorage.

This was a good start, and there were some nice birds too, including **Great Crested Tern**, many **Black-naped Terns** feeding over the reefs, and also **Maldivian House Crow** and **Grey Heron** on the islands.

Once anchored in the lagoon of Guraidhoo Island, 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 lovely to cool down in the water and enjoy the great diversity of fishes, including small schools of **Barracuda**, an impressive **White-tailed (=Mangrove) Stingray**, and many **Featherstars** appearing to feed as the light faded.

After dinner, the stern light attracted a host of plankton (including spawning **Polychaete Worms**, juvenile **Mantis Shrimps** and thousands of **Copepods**) which in turn drew in a succession of hungry fish (including **Bigeye**

Scads and **Bigeye Jack** – the names giving a hint to their nocturnal lifestyles) and a rather impressive green-eyed **Squid**.

Day 2, Monday 15 October 2018

What an amazing day! It was calm first thing, and stayed gloriously calm all day. Our morning snorkel took us into Guraidhoo Channel, where we enjoyed a particularly close encounter with a **Spotted Eagle Ray**, as well as more fleeting glimpses of a **Manta Ray** and a **Whitetip Reef Shark**. There was also a **Hawksbill Turtle**, **Octopus**, **Porcupinefish**, clouds of **Silver Sprats** and luxuriant growths of **Boulder Corals** (*Porites*) on the reef top.

As we returned to *Keana*, a small school of **Spinner Dolphins** was heading in and briefly bowrode. Back on board we heard from those who had not snorkelled that six separate schools of **Spinner Dolphins** had swam into the atoll while we were out.



Spinner Dolphin

As breakfast finished we started out into the ocean, passing a **Manta** at the surface as we left the atoll. In these conditions it was not surprising that our first sighting of the day was again **Dwarf Sperm Whale** – this time a mother and calf pair. Our next encounter was less expected. Some fins breaking the surface were first taken to be Sailfish, but as we drew closer we could see that they were **Mobula Rays**, smaller cousins of the Manta. There were five in all, although one was out of sight

for most of the time. For the others, three spent most of the time closely shadowing the fourth. They swam in line ahead, and in circles, sometime just a few metres from the boat, and clearly visible just beneath the glassy surface. Later examination of photos confirmed our suspicion that these were males pursuing a female. The photos also enabled us to identify the species: ***Mobula mobular***, the Spine-tailed Devil-ray (also known as Long-tailed Mobula).



Mobula Rays

After this fantastic encounter we were all buzzing. Moving on, we headed offshore towards some distant tuna fishing boats. But on the way we were distracted by some active dolphins, which proved to be **Striped Dolphins**. They were gorgeous, and they held us entranced as they bowrode. But all too soon we turned back on course towards fishing boats, only to be diverted again. This time it was a mixed school of **Spotted and Spinner Dolphins**, trailing a school of actively jumping **Yellowfin Tuna**. We stayed over 30 minutes with this school and the crew even caught a fish, a splendid **Dolphinfish** (also known as Mahimahi or Dorado). This species makes very fine eating, as we found out for ourselves at dinner tonight.

We finally made it to the fishing boats, which were hand-lining for **Yellowfin Tuna** – with one being hauled in just as we arrived. There were plenty of **Spotted Dolphins** here too, as well as smaller numbers of **Spinner Dolphins**.

It was now lunchtime, and we were just two nautical miles south of our starting point! Nor did we make much faster progress after lunch when we stopped to watch a small group of **Dwarf Sperm Whales** (two mother-calf pairs and another one or perhaps two individuals). We tried to edge closer for photography, and also to use the drone, but the whales were very wary, and neither approach was successful.

Now it was mid-afternoon and we were a long way from our intended anchorage. So we changed plans and headed in towards a much nearer island, Alimatha in Vaavu Atoll, passing more **Dwarf Sperm Whales**, and also some distant **beaked whales** and unidentified dolphins as we went.

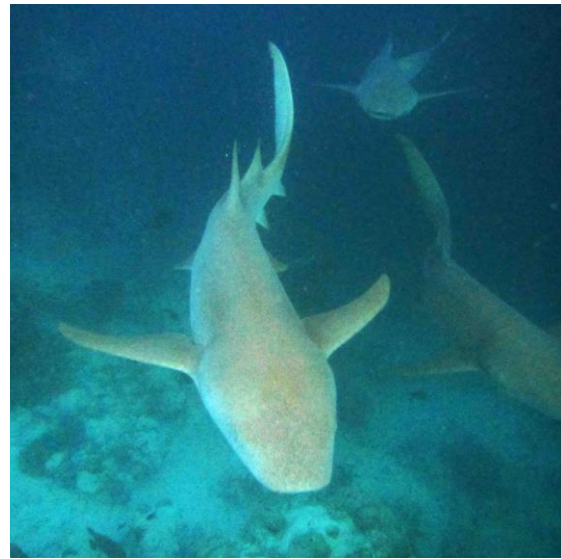
As we entered Vaavu Atoll we passed one more school of Spinner Dolphins, heading out. But we passed them with hardly a glance and were soon anchored. For we had plans for a special evening snorkel, foreshadowed by a big Nurse Shark which appeared under our stern, as we were just setting off in the *dhoni*.

We were heading for the house reef of Alimatha Island, passing another group of **Spinner Dolphins** on the way. As we jumped in and started drifting down the reef we could see a **Nurse Shark** far below. Then more, and more **LARGE Nurse Sharks** appeared, swimming down the reef alongside us. Wow! There was a handful of **Blacktip Reef Sharks** too, but our Nurse Sharks encounters made this a quite extraordinary snorkel.

On the short ride back to *Keana* we enjoyed a glorious sunset, complete with green flash. And when we arrived, there were three **Nurse Sharks** swimming under stern. An irresistible attraction for a few hardy souls, who slipped in for a final snorkel session.

Evening slide show: Dolphins of the Maldives, Followed by more **Nurse Shark** watching, although by now they had been joined by a

coterie of **Remoras** and a host of **Bigeye Scads**.



Nurse Sharks

Day 3, Tues 16 October 2018

We left early from Alimatha, crossing over to Fotheyo for our morning snorkel. On the way we had a glimpse of **Dwarf Sperm Whales**, and a nice encounter with **Spotted Dolphins**. Once we were anchored near Fotheyo sandbank, most of us set off in the *dhoni* for the channel, while the dingy nipped across to the sandbank. In the channel the snorkelers enjoyed a marvellous 70 minutes in the water, drifting slowly with the current along the reef, past schools of **Silver Sprats** and **Collared Butterflyfish**. Soon after we entered the water, a large pod of **Spinner Dolphins** entered the channel: we could hear them whistling, and looking above the surface we could see them racing in. As we rounded the reef corner the current eddied briefly, but then it reverted to a gentle drift on the outside. And here were many larger beasts, including **White-tailed Stingrays**, **Whitetip Reef Shark** and **Hawksbill Turtle**, as well as a mating pair of **Octopus**, the male with one tentacle resolutely caressing his girl, despite all the attention he was receiving from snorkelers overhead.

Keana departed as we enjoyed our late

breakfast. Some **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** put in the briefest of appearances in the narrow channel, where we could not turn. But out in the ocean some splashing ahead alerted us to the presence of two separate groups of rumbustious dolphins. They both turned out to be **Risso's Dolphins**. The first group was relatively small, perhaps a dozen animals at most, charging through the water with much breaching and splashing. We soon realised that they were heading in the direction of the second, larger group of **Risso's Dolphins**, presumably trying to catch up. There were over 100 in this second group, well spread out but equally frisky, with much breaching, head-banging and tail-slapping. By careful manoeuvring we were able to have several subgroups pass alongside, giving wonderful views of both grey and white individuals.



Risso's Dolphin

Eventually we pushed on, passing Fotheyo Island itself (the eastern-most point of the Maldives) and on towards the next atoll. The wind had picked up slightly (albeit to barely a Force 3) but even that started to die away now, and the sea was becoming wonderfully calm again. Which provided the ideal stage for **Striped Dolphins**. A group suddenly rushed in to bowride, with at least 14 stacked up beneath our bows. But just as quickly they became bored with our relatively slow progress (even at full throttle) and they soon abandoned us in their wake.

As we approached Meemu Atoll, we could see **Spinner Dolphins** coming out into the ocean for their night's fishing. We diverted to join one group, and soon had them bowriding and leaping alongside. But they were heading out and we needed to get in.

Once anchored, near a reef opposite Maduvveri Island, two went ashore in the dinghy, while the rest headed off in the *dhoni* for a late afternoon snorkel. The water was clear and bright, and the reef was pleasantly rich with corals, and there were **Featherstars** emerging as the light faded. There were plenty of nice fish too, including two **Giant Morays**, schools of **Yellowback and Lunar Fusiliers**, and large groups of several species of **Butterflyfish** (Raccoon, Double-saddle, Gold-headed, Threadfin, Spot-nape) perhaps about to spawn.

Evening slide show: Beaked Whales of the Maldives, on the top deck.

Day 4, Wed 17 October 2018

Another fantastic day! We set off early, with flat calm seas, having already spotted **Pilot Whales** offshore. As soon as we cleared the channel we turned west to catch up and travel with them. It was a large group, in wide line abreast, with many **Common Bottlenose Dolphins** in attendance. We travelled with them, alternating between subgroups, letting them ride alongside before diving. After about 45 minutes we spotted a second group of **Pilot Whales**, well ahead. They were logging quietly at the surface, and we moved up towards them, cutting the engine well ahead and drifting to a stop just alongside. What followed was pure magic as they continued to lie quiet and relaxed at the surface, occasionally spy-hopping to get a better view of us watching them.

When we finally left the Pilot Whales and turned back on course, 2 hours had passed, and

we were back where we started! So we pushed on, around the outside of Meemu Atoll, with a glimpse of a **Beaked Whale** and several sightings of **Dwarf Sperm Whales**.

We had planned to have a late morning snorkel on the outer reef of Meemu Atoll. As we came in towards the reef a **Manta Ray** appeared alongside the boat. On the reef edge itself there were numerous **Hawksbill Turtles**, most people seeing five or more. For those who ventured into shallower waters there was a large **White-tailed Stingray**, and a nice variety of fishes only found in this habitat: **Surge Hawkfish**, **Surge Wrasse**, **Surge Damselfish** and **Reef Picasso Triggerfish**.

When we got back on board, Tim had spotted more **Dwarf Sperm Whales** and a **Beaked Whale**, probably Cuvier's. As we continued southwards, apart from three more sightings of **Dwarf Sperm Whale**, and one jumping **Manta Ray**, things were rather quiet until we reached the very south of Meemu Atoll. Then it became very busy indeed. There were literally hundreds of **Spinner Dolphins** coming out of the channel. A **Sailfish** appeared at the surface, and **Pilot Whales** were spotted further out. It was a group of 20 animals, logging at the surface. We drifted up to them, and several swam under our bows, so close that it was obvious to all just how big and bulky they were. And they were vocal too, gurgling, squirting and caa-ing as well as spy-hopping.

As we came in to anchor, more Spinner Dolphins streamed by, heading out to sea, and the sun set behind a palm-fringed island. A glorious finale to a fantastic day. .

Evening talk: Blackfish of Maldives.

Day 5, Thurs 18 October 2018

We had enjoyed a run of good days so far, but today outshone them all. It was superb! We

started with our morning snorkel excursion, on the way to which we passed a school of over 300 **Spinner Dolphins**, coming into the atoll for their daytime rest. They readily bowrode as long as we travelled in exactly the direction they wanted.

At the snorkel site, Alex jumped in to check the current, and immediately spotted a **Manta Ray** on the cleaning station. So all was looking good. There was a gentle drift, so we jumped in upstream and drifted slowly down the reef towards the cleaning station. The reef itself was full of interest, with huge **Porites** coral blocks, which themselves were home to myriad creatures including **Slate-pencil Urchins** and **Christmas Tree Worms**. There were divers around the cleaning station when we arrived, but no Mantas. We waited, but none appeared. However, no sooner did we start to drift away, than the **Manta Rays** turned up. First one, then three, then six. They were so graceful that we were all buzzing with excitement when we finally returned to the *dhoni* and *Keana*.



Manta Ray

Heading out into the ocean it did not take long for our first encounter: a massive school of **Pilot Whales**, all heading NW in an extended line abreast (some 6 km wide). We travelled with them for 45 minutes, having then ride alongside and pass behind, giving fabulous views. They were accompanied by **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**, and we spotted a pair of **Wahoo** at the surface too. But the Pilots were clearly on a mission and not to be distracted.

Leaving the Pilots we continued on towards Thaa Atoll, passing a single **Dwarf Sperm Whale**. Then a frenetic group of **Striped Dolphins** eagerly rushed in to bowride. One individual, with an obvious large **Remora** on its right side, leapt repeatedly, slapping down on its side in an apparently unsuccessful attempt to dislodge the unwelcome hitch-hiker. The Striped Dolphins soon got bored with our relatively slow progress and sped away.

After lunch we had another **Dwarf Sperm Whale** sighting (three this time) and then a wonderful encounter with **Fraser's Dolphins**. There were over 200, all in one tight school charging across the ocean, leaving a great churning wake behind. They bowrode by the dozen, leaping in from both sides to join the fun.



Fraser's Dolphin school

As we reluctantly left the Fraser's we did not imagine that we could have a better cetacean encounter today. But as we rounded the SE side of Thaa Atoll we spotted a couple of Beaked Whales ahead. They were at some distance so we were not able to identify them, but we stopped at the spot where they had dived and waited. We were briefly distracted by a large **Sicklefin Mobula Ray** (*Mobula tarapacana*) which appeared off our stern, but 23 minutes later the whales popped up barely 400m astern. We had better views this time: there were two animals, one a fair bit smaller than the other; the larger had a very prominent and pointed dorsal; they were brown coloured,

but the larger seemed to have a rather pale head. After they dived we moved closer and waited again. After 22 minutes they reappeared again, a bit closer. Again we could see the pale head and what appeared to be a distinct beak on the larger animals. One more wait, this time of 20 minutes, and we had them in view for the fourth time. Finally, good views and good photos showed what we needed to see: the shape of the head. It was sloped, not steeply but gently. These were **Deraniyagala's Beaked Whales**, probably a mother and juvenile. Only known since 2014, and first identified alive at sea in 2017, this is possibly the least known of all cetaceans. Wow!

As we headed in to the atoll, everyone was elated. A feeling enhanced by the passage of **Spinner Dolphins** heading out. 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 or swim just before sunset. At which point two **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** appeared, patrolling the lagoon.

Evening activity: Plankton gazing and **Mantis Shrimp** photography off the stern fishing platform



Banded Mantis Shrimp

Day 6, Friday 19 October 2018

Our morning snorkel today was at Rainbow Reef, a delightful detached reef inside the atoll. The corals were particularly good here, with many massive *Porites* (many adorned with **Christmas Tree Worms**), numerous *Pocillipora* and even several *Acropora* on the steep slopes. There were large numbers of planktivorous fishes around the reef edge, and most people enjoyed encounters with **Hawksbill Turtles** and **Whitetip Reef Sharks**.

Back on board *Keana* we showered and had breakfast before moving out into the deep Veimandhoo Channel. Unusually there were no Spinner Dolphins to be seen, but as we came out into the channel we spotted the probable reason why: **Killer Whales**. There appeared to be six (although reviewing drone footage later showed that there were seven). We spent 1½ magical hours with these animals. By approaching slowly, and stopping upwind so that we drifted very gently down towards them, we were able to have them around, and under, the boat on three separate occasions. Having such large creatures so close was extraordinary. There were two smaller individuals, one calf and a juvenile, and four (later revised to five) adults. At one point they appeared to be feeding, with at least two holding large fish in their jaws. There was tail-slapping too, and one breach. All-in-all an amazing encounter.



Killer Whales, mother and calf

Finally moving on, we did not think we could match this early sighting. But not long afterwards we spotted a Beaked Whale. It seemed to be feeding, because it stayed in one area, moving barely a mile in two hours. During this time we saw it at the surface five times (following dives of 20 to 33 minutes duration). From the very outset it was clear that this was a large Beaked Whale, orangey-brown in colour, fading to very pale on the head. Good views and photos showed that the head was sloping: **Cuvier's Beaked Whale**. It was staying not far from the Killer Whales, but was presumably able to avoid their attentions, as a deep-diving individual.

So too the five single **Dwarf Sperm Whales** we subsequently spotted. Other cetaceans were not to be seen, until we spotted a very distant leap and splash. A long journey out towards Laamu Atoll finally brought us to a particularly active school of **Striped Dolphins**, some leaping 5m+ into the air. They were being trailed by **Tropical Shearwaters**, scavenging on scraps of food or faeces.



Striped Dolphin

Coming back into Thaa Atoll, there were **Maldivian House Crows**, **Fruit Bats** and **Carpenter Bees** flying between islands. Next to one of the islands, the wreck of a tug and its barge high up on the outer reef provided a reminder of the potential dangers of the sea.

Evening talk: Formation of the Maldivian Atolls, on the top deck under the stars. And

after dinner, there were **Squid, Sea Skaters** and fish fry under the stern light.

Day 7, Saturday 20 Oct 2018

We started today with a snorkel on the channel reef inside of Veimandhoo Island. There was a nice contrast between the steep drop-off (complete with **Seafans**) and the shallow reef top. Along the reef edge there were schools of **Black-pyramid Butterflyfish, Red-toothed Triggerfish** and **Silver Sprats**. Down slope were large **Groupers** and **Napoleon Wrasse**. While in the shallows on top, there were smaller creatures including a **Nudibranch** (*Phyllidia varicosa*), **Cushion Stars** and **Reef Squid**.

Back on board and we were soon heading out into the open ocean. It was flat calm again, so almost immediately we had our first sighting: a large group of **Pilot Whales**, with attendant **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**, heading east. We went with them, for an hour, but this was the wrong direction for us, so we reluctantly left them and turned back on course.

However, not long afterwards we spotted a second group of **Pilot Whales**, this time accompanied by both **Common Bottlenose** and **Fraser's Dolphins**. These animals too were heading east, so by the time we left them it was late morning and we were actually further from our planned destination than when we started!



Fraser's Dolphins

A brief lull in cetacean sightings allowed us to make up some ground (with just a minor diversion for a **White-tailed Tropicbird**). But then a single cetacean stopped us. We could not make out what it was, so we waited for it to resurface. Eventually three animals appeared, but heading directly away from us, so still could not see what they were. After another wait, of 25 minutes, they were spotted again. Now they were some distance away, but we had a reasonable view which confirmed that they were small Beaked Whales. We leapfrogged ahead of them and waited again (taking advantage of their long dive times to grab lunch). After 22 minutes all three surfaced together, right next to *Keana*! They were so close we could clearly hear their soft exhalations, and also clearly see their long beaks and arched jawlines. These were **Blainville's Beaked Whales** (=Dense-beaked Whales). They all rolled at the surface numerous times, as they slowly swam around our bows, apparently checking us out and completely unconcerned by our presence. None had erupted teeth or extensive scarring, so these may have been females or immature males. Whatever the case it was a world-class sighting, and we were all elated as they dived and we moved on.



Blainville's Beaked Whale

Not long after this more splashing ahead alerted us to yet another group of **Pilot Whales, Bottlenose and Fraser's**. They were again heading the 'wrong' way, although we did spend 30 minutes with them before turning

back on course. While with this group we spotted what looked like a **Short-tailed Shearwater**, and soon afterwards a **Bulwer's Petrel** flew by.

Now time was getting on, so we did not pause for four **Dwarf Sperm Whales**. But when two large **Orcas** appeared ahead, we had to stop. They, unfortunately, were not the least interested in us, so we had to trail behind for some time before finally getting alongside and having some good views (with a palm-fringed island as the backdrop).



Killer Whale

Now it was getting late, so it was full speed ahead, and no stopping for a succession of dolphin sightings (mainly **Risso's**). We entered the channel to Kandufushi Island just as the sun was setting, disturbing a pair of **Green Turtles** locked in a mating embrace.

Evening talk: Corals and Stars, on top deck.



Kandufushi, sunset

Day 8, Sun 21 October 2018

We started with an early run ashore in the dinghy to the delightful uninhabited island of Kandufushi. Two pairs of **Black-naped Terns** were nesting up above the high tide mark, and made their disapproval of our presence quite clear. The snorkelling off the beach was a delight, with plenty of fishes (especially on the channel side, where there were great schools of **Parrotfish** and **Fusiliers**) as well as **Octopus** and **Tiger Cowrie**.



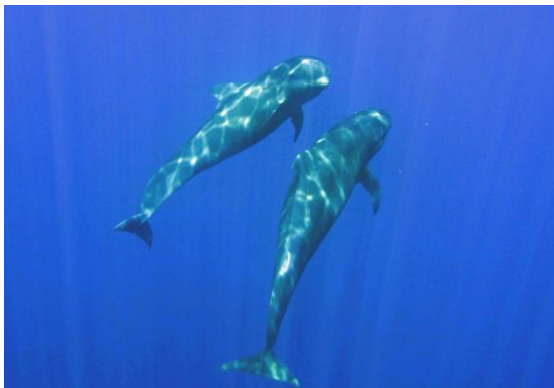
Kandufushi, mid-morning



Black-naped Tern, chick and egg

Once out in the ocean it was just minutes before our first cetacean sighting, and one that was to keep us busy for 2½ hours. There must have been well over 100 **Pilot Whales**, as well as **Fraser's Dolphins** and **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**, spread in small subgroups over several square miles of ocean. We gently approached a couple of small pods of Pilot Whales and soon had them swimming under our bows. In the glassy calm conditions we could see the entire animals and also hear their clicks and whistles.

With such perfect conditions, and relaxed cetaceans, we decided to try and snorkel with them. Once more we gently approached a pod of resting Pilot Whales, and soon had them just off to one side. The snorkelers slipped in off the stern and we made our way very slowly and stealthily towards the Pilots. Some had a view of them, at the edge of visibility, as well as a glimpse of the Fraser's Dolphin that swam in to view. But many saw nothing, so we tried again. By rigging a rope to the bows, we could make our way forward while the boat was in neutral but still under way. This worked a treat for those who were in first, with sightings of both Pilot Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins. Not everyone got to see the cetaceans underwater, but just to be in the bright blue ocean with them, hearing their clicks and whistles was a delight.



Pilot Whales

It was nearly midday when we eventually moved on, with last night's anchorage at Kandufushi still very much in sight. And we did not get far before our next encounter, with more **Pilot Whales** coming in under the bows. One had a distinctively damaged dorsal fin, cut and folded over. We next diverted for a **Yellowfin Tuna** school, with **Sooty Terns**, **Great Crested Terns** and **Tropical Shearwaters** in attendance. Immediately after this the Captain saw a Whale Shark at the surface; we turned but it had dived and we did not see it again.

It was now mid-afternoon and we found two more groups of **Pilots Whales**, one heading

south the other north. Both came in under our bows and also rode along astern. We then turned in to Dhaalu Atoll, anchoring near a tiny sandbank. Those that wanted a snorkel headed ashore in the dingy. There were several **Reef Squid** along the reef edge and a sizeable **Whitetip Reef Shark** too, and as the light faded **Featherstars** and **Lionfish** started to appear.

Evening talk: the Maldivian seasons, on the top deck.

Day 9, Monday 22 October 2018

For the keen ones there was a snorkel first thing, on the sandbank reef. The fishes here were superb. On the shallow reef top the morning light was gorgeous and the fishes were a real highlight, being so abundant and so close. There were also plenty of molluscs, including **Tiger Cowries** and **Spider Shells**. Meanwhile on the sandbank itself there were perhaps 100 **Noddies** and similar number of **Saunders Terns**.

During breakfast, we crossed over the atoll and out through a channel at the northern end. Sea conditions were no longer mirror-calm, but still very good. We certainly should have been able to see animals at the surface; we did indeed spot several schools of **Yellowfin Tuna** (one with 22 **Sooty Terns**, two **Flesh-footed Shearwaters** and one **Tropical Shearwater** in attendance). But no cetaceans all morning.

Continuing on into the deep Ariyadhoo Channel, between Faafu and Ari Atolls, we finally found some dolphins ahead: **Spinner Dolphins**, which readily bowrode. We then moved close to the reef on the SW corner of Ari Atoll, where we spotted several birds (including our first **Maldivian Little Herons**) and **Fruit Bats**.

Once anchored in the wide lagoon of Dhigurah Island, the snorkelers were soon into the dhoni and heading to the nearby reef. The reef top

was some 5m down, much deeper than we were used to, and it was slightly choppy. But this was a great snorkel. There were huge numbers of plankton-eating fish, including great clouds of **Fusiliers** (Variable-lined, Lunar, Neon-streak, Gold-backed and Yellow-tailed), **Red-toothed Triggerfishes** and **Schooling Bannerfish**. There were also two **Black-blotched Stingrays**, **White-spotted Eagle Rays**, **Napoleon Wrasse** and **Blacktip Reef Shark**.

Evening talk: Cetaceans and Indian Ocean tuna fisheries, with Bali-Komodo video after dinner.

Day 10, Tues 23 October 2018

Our final morning snorkel was on the outer reef of Dhigurah Island, and it proved to be a great one. There were plenty of *Acropora* corals on the reef itself. While up in the water column were clouds of **Black Pyramid Butterflyfish** and large swirling schools of **Indian Mackerel**, flashing silver as they opened their gapes to filter plankton. We also spotted a particularly chilled **Hawksbill Turtle**, **Whitetip Reef Sharks** and a **Manta Ray**.



Bottlenose Dolphin under the bows

Keana had moved from our anchorage to pick us up, so as soon as we were back on board we started off on the crossing back to Malé. At which point some splashing was spotted,

coming from an active school of **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**. Not long afterwards we had encounters with two schools of Spinner Dolphins, both of which were travelling roughly northeastwards, and both of which enthusiastically bowrode,

By now we were close to South Malé Atoll, which we entered just prior to lunch. In the bright midday sun, the ring reefs were glowing brilliant turquoise, highlighting the gleaming white **Black-naped Terns** feeding around their edges.

We crossed over the atoll, passing out near Embudu, and sailed up the outside of the airport island. Here we had our last sightings of the trip: a pair of **Cuvier's Beaked Whales** (the presumed male strikingly pale) and a couple of **Common Bottlenose Dolphins** which approached our boat while waiting for the Cuvier's. We were anchored in busy Hulumalé anchorage by 1600h, with plenty of time for a group photo before sunset.

Evening presentation: Trip review and spectacular trip video by Alex.

Day 11, Wed 24 October 2018

After breakfast there were sad farewells and two transfers to the airport by *dhoni* at different times.

CETACEAN SUMMARY

During our cruise we recorded an excellent total of 13 different species, from 93 sightings (which made 104 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>	24	1834
Spotted Dolphins	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>	4	456
Striped Dolphins	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	4	185
Risso's Dolphins	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	4	214
Common Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	9	350
Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	2	6
Fraser's Dolphin	<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>	4	510
Shortfin Pilot Whales	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	11	500
Killer Whale	<i>Orcinus orca</i>	2	9
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>	21	50
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>	2	4
Blainville's Beaked Whale	<i>Mesoplodon densirostris</i>	1	3
Deraniyagala's Beaked Whale	<i>Mesoplodon hotaula</i>	1	2
Unidentified Beaked Whale	Ziphiidae	5	8
Unidentified dolphins		7	113
Unidentified cetaceans		3	33
		104	4277



Moray Eel



Hawksbill Turtle

BIRDS

Maldives does not have a great diversity of birds, so our total of just 20 species seen in October is not unexpected:

1	Tropical Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bailloni</i>
2	Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus carneipes</i>
3	Probable Short-tailed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>
4	Bulwer's Petrel	<i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>
5	White-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>
6	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
7	Maldivian Little Heron	<i>Butorides striata didii</i>
8	White-breasted Waterhen (H)	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
9	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
10	Saunders Tern	<i>Sterna saundersi</i>
11	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
12	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>
13	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
14	Great Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>
15	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
16	Lesser Noddy	<i>Anous tenuirostris</i>
17	Sooty Tern	<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>
18	Bridled Tern	<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>
19	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
20	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens maledivicus</i>

ANCHORAGES

Day 1	14 Oct 2018	Guraidhoo	South Malé Atoll
Day 2	15 Oct 2018	Alimatha	Vaavu Atoll
Day 3	16 Oct 2018	Maduvveri	Meemu Atoll
Day 4	17 Oct 2018	Kolhufushi	Meemu Atoll
Day 5	18 Oct 2018	Kalufahalafushi	Thaa Atoll
Day 6	19 Oct 2018	Veimandoo	Thaa Atoll
Day 7	20 Oct 2018	Kandufushi	Thaa Atoll
Day 8	21 Oct 2018	Hudhufushifinolhu	Dhaalu Atoll
Day 9	22 Oct 2018	Dhigurah	South Ari Atoll
Day 10	23 Oct 2018	Hulumalé	North Malé Atoll
Day 11	24 Oct 2018	Disembark	

CONTACT DETAILS

Chas and Sue ANDERSON

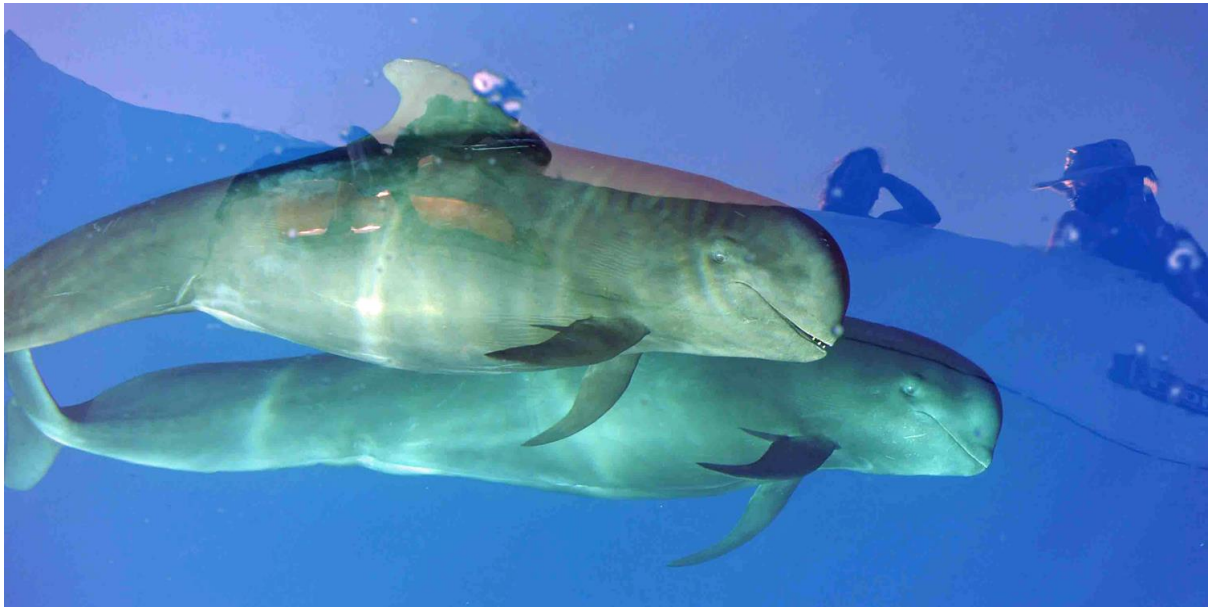
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Pilot Whales under the bows