

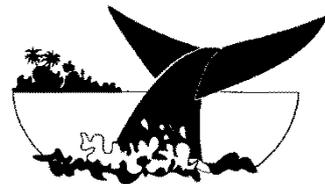
# WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCHING TRIP REPORT



*Spinner Dolphin*

## **MALDIVES EXPLORER CENTRAL ATOLLS CRUISE 28 October to 8 November 2015**

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# TROPICAL DOLPHINS AND WHALES

## MALDIVES EXPLORER

### *M.V. Hope Cruiser, 28 Oct to 8 Nov 2015*

Our 12-day wildlife cruise took us all the way south to Thaa Atoll, well beyond the normal tourist areas. This allowed us to go ashore on several beautiful and rarely-visited inhabited and uninhabited islands. Although we did have one wet and windy day, the weather was mostly excellent. As a result we enjoyed many wonderful cetacean sightings, of ten different species, with highlights including Killer Whales and Rough-toothed Dolphins. There was a nice variety of seabirds too, with migrating Shearwaters and Storm-petrels being particularly noteworthy. And below the surface, snorkelling on the coral reefs was a joy. The corals themselves were spectacular, and especially in Thaa Atoll were world-class. The reef fishes were overwhelming in their abundance, diversity and brilliant colouration. Hawksbill Turtles were seen regularly, although our reptilian highlight was undoubtedly a magnificent Leatherback Turtle.

#### Day 1, Wednesday 28 Oct 2015

We all met at the airport, and were soon on the *dhoni* heading for the safari boat anchorage and *Hope Cruiser*. Following welcomes and a safety briefing, there was time to unpack in the cabins, and slap on some sun cream before coming back on deck.

We were off just after noon, passing pairs of **Black-naped Terns** on our way out of the anchorage. Once out into the ocean, in wonderful calm conditions, we were sure to spot something sooner or later. Sure enough there was a sighting of a **Marlin** feeding at the surface, with much thrashing about and flashing of fins. Soon after that we spotted some local tuna fishing boats further offshore, and altered course towards them. As we approached it became clear that there were dolphins near the boats, as even from a distance we could see some jumping. They were **Spotted Dolphins**, associated with **Yellowfin Tuna**. We first came across a small group of perhaps 20-25 Spotted, which gave us a false impression of the numbers present. For as we got closer to the fishing boats we found that there were **hundreds of Spotted Dolphins**, spread out over a huge area of ocean. The nearest fishing boat hooked a tuna

and we stopped to watch the fishermen haul it in by hand. It was clearly hard work, with the struggle going one way then the other. But in the end, of course, the fishermen prevailed, pulling on board a sizeable **Yellowfin Tuna** of perhaps 50kg.



*Spotted Dolphin*

All the while the tuna school, the Spotted Dolphins, and the attendant **Great Crested Terns** (plus a few **Roseate Terns** and **Lesser Noddies**) were gradually working their way southwards. We went with them, until it was time to turn in towards the atoll.

At this point we spotted a **Dwarf Sperm Whale** and a pair of **Beaked Whales**, in quick succession. Although we did get good looks at both species, neither stayed up for long, and so we pressed on.

As soon as we were anchored at Guraidhoo we hopped onto the *dhoni* for our evening snorkel on the nearby reef. The reef top was crowded with corals, but there was also a slight current pushing into the shallows, so we stayed on the edge admiring the fishes on the slope. The light was fading, so **Lionfishes** were starting to appear. But the most memorable fishes were the billowing clouds of **Silver Sprats** swirling all around in the deeper water.

After a tasty dinner prepared by our Sri Lankan chef, most of us headed to our cabins for an early night.

## Day 2, Thursday 29 October

A beautiful, sunny morning. After early teas and coffees we boarded the *dhoni* for our snorkel, on a nearby reef. There was just the slightest of current, which carried us effortlessly down the length of the reef, admiring the wonderful coral growths in the shallows as we drifted. As ever there were numerous colourful reef fishes. Off the slope there was plenty of plankton drifting by, including bright, iridescent blue specks of **Sapphire Copepods**. There were banks of **Silver Sprats** too, occasionally thrown into a panic by the appearance of ravenous **Little Tuna** (=Kawakawa) and **Bluefin Jacks**. Further down the reef **Great Crested and Black-naped Terns** were taking advantage of the commotion to feast on the fleeing Sprats.



*MV Hope Cruiser*

After breakfast, out in the ocean, things soon started to get interesting. First up a **Marlin**, thrashing at the surface as it hunted. And then something quite extraordinary. A glimpse of something just ahead (well spotted Adrian!) luckily caused us to slow the boat, and there just ahead was a **Leatherback Turtle**. With its large, ridged shell and grizzled head it was unmistakable, and easily seen by all. These animals are very rare in the Maldives, and indeed increasingly rare throughout the Indian Ocean, so we were really lucky to have such a wonderful sighting.



*Leatherback Turtle*

After the turtle sank into the depths we moved on. And it was not too long before we had two separate encounters with **Spinner Dolphins**. We spent a long time with the first group, which consisted of well over 100 individuals, all heading NW. We went with them, and soon had some bow-riding. Conditions were good, so a small party went out in the dingy, and returned with some wonderful underwater video of them racing ahead of the dingy. The second group of **Spinner Dolphins** was rather smaller but still gave us some lovely views.

It was well into the afternoon now, and things seemed a little quite until we spotted some discrete splashing in the distance. Closing in, we temporarily lost them, but then found them again off to one side. Before we know it a couple of dolphins were bow-riding. Big dorsal fins, very narrow dorsal cape, and sloping head: **Rough-toothed Dolphins**. Remarkably for this normally shy species, they

played near the bows for some time, before moving off. We shadowed them, and had them on the bows again before they finally moved off, and we set course for our anchorage.



*Rough-toothed Dolphin*

As we approached the reef channel, two white-rumped **Storm-petrels** flew by in the middle distance (just a bit too far for positive identification, but probably Wilson's). And on the sandbank to the side of the channel were plenty more birds: **Great Crested Terns**, **Black-naped Terns**, **Saunders** and **Common Terns**, plus more than 200 **Brown and Lesser Noddies**.

We were soon anchored, and onto the *dhoni* for our evening snorkel just as a great school of **Spinner Dolphins** swam by, with much leaping and spinning, on their way to the channel and out to sea for their night's feeding. We went with them, and had dozens bow-riding and leaping alongside. Eventually we had to leave the dolphins and turn back for our snorkel on the inner reef. It was a delightful spot, with coral patches interspersed with white coral sand patches. Highlights included **Spotfin Lionfish** and two **Stingrays**.

It had been a superb day for marine wildlife sightings, but it was not over yet. As we sat down to dinner a large **Manta Ray** appeared behind the boat, feeding on the plankton attracted by our stern spotlights. It made several passes before some adventurous soles decided to break out the snorkel gear and get

in. The reward: some wonderful underwater views as it glided by in the velvety darkness.

Evening slide show: Spinner, Spotted and Rough-toothed Dolphins



*Spotfin Lionfish*

### Day 3, Friday 30 October

We started with a wonderful snorkel in Fotheyo Channel. And the snorkel itself started with a bang. We were just about to jump near the reef when **Spinner Dolphins** appeared, so we quickly changed direction and swam out into the Channel. The quickest got to see, and hear, them fly by underwater.



*Spinner Dolphins*

Then back to the reef, where the slight in-current drifted us very gently along the slope. On the reef top the bright morning sunlight lit the corals wonderfully. And among all the reef fishes there were three **White-spotted Eagle-rays**, a couple of **Whitetip Reef Sharks** and a **Reef Lobster**.

Back on board *Hope Cruiser* a large **Napoleon Wrasse** appeared off the stern, just as breakfast was called. Then we were off, out into the ocean and heading around the eastern-most point of the Maldives. Just off the point we spotted a pair of **Beaked Whales**. They dived, so we settled in to wait for them to resurface. But something else appeared off to the south (well spotted again, Adrian!). **Killer Whales!** We chose the Orcas in the hand rather than two Beaked Whales in the depths, and moved south. The Killer Whales were repeatedly diving in the same spot, presumably to feed on something below the surface. A single **Frigatebird** and three **Great Crested Terns** were in attendance, adding to the impression that food was in the offing. As we approached it looked like there were four or possibly even five Killer Whales, although when we got near there we could see what appeared to be just three animals: two big females and a calf (although later inspection of photos showed that there were three adults and one calf). Of course we were happy to spend time with them, enjoying some wonderful close views and clearly hearing their explosive breaths each time they surfaced.



Killer Whale

Eventually it was time to move on. Off the SE corner of Fotheyo we found a big group of **Spinner Dolphins**, some of which came in to bowride. But as this was the middle of their 'night' they were not over enthusiastic. So we pressed on southwards. But there was not much to be found – perhaps the Killer Whales had passed this way and scared all the other cetaceans away. Because, apart from a single **Dwarf Sperm Whale**, we saw no more cetaceans all afternoon.

By 1630 we were approaching our anchorage near Dhiggaru island. The *dhoni* was soon alongside and we were off for our snorkel on a nearby reef. A moderate in-current brought clear water over the reef, which boasted rich corals along the top and a steep drop-off on one side. There were clouds of **Schooling Bannerfish**, gangs of **Convict Surgeonfishes**, two **Whitetip Reef Sharks**, and, in the gathering darkness, spawning **Sea Cucumbers** and numerous **Featherstars**. As we got back onto the *dhoni*, the sun was setting in a blaze of orange. A perfect ending to a great day.

Evening talk: Blackfish

## Day 4, Saturday 31 October

With a long way to go today, we set off early this morning. The sky was cloudy, but it was not windy as we made our way out of the atoll. At 0800 we stopped for a snorkel on the outer reef. And as luck would have it, a small school of **Spinner Dolphins** swam by, just as we jumped in, allowing several of us a view of them speeding by underwater. On the reef there were many large **Table Corals** near the dropoff, and smaller more robust species in the shallower water. Highlights included a **Hawksbill Turtle**, a **Fan-tail Stingray**, **Dogtooth Tuna**, **Giant Trevally** and several enormous **Groupers**.

Back on the main boat the wind picked up and the rain started. It lasted on and off most of the

day, but did not prevent us having some great sightings. First up a small group of four Beaked Whales off Muli Island. We spotted them at some distance, and they dived before we got close. So we waited, and 27 minutes later they surfaced again. They were large beaked whales with tall dorsal fins, and a uniform grey-brown colouration: probably **Longman's Beaked Whales**, although we did not get good views of their heads to confirm identification. We waited another full hour but did not see them again.

Moving on, our next sighting was of **Striped Dolphins**. Again we spotted them from some distance, with their exuberant porpoising. Up close they are the most beautiful of dolphins, and gave us a fine show of bow-riding and leaping.

Rounding the southern tip of Meemu Atoll there were **Manta Rays** feeding at the surface. And as we entered the channel, hundreds of **Spinner Dolphins** were heading out. They were in playful mood, with much jumping, spinning and bow-riding.

We were soon anchored in the wide lagoon of Kolhuvaariyafushi island. Most of us headed off to snorkel on the nearby reef (good corals, **Hawksbill Turtle** and **Octopus**), while Dorus visited the island by dingy.

Evening talk: Striped, Fraser's and Risso's Dolphins



Featherstar

## Day 5, Sunday 1 November

Today started early, but not well. The weather first thing did not look good. It was calm, but there were dark grey storm clouds in almost every direction. Only to the south, where we wanted to go, did it seem a bit lighter. So we decided to set off. But the wind picked up and the rain set in, and the captain decided it was best to turn back and wait for things to improve. So we returned to our anchorage, and enjoyed breakfast as the rain beat down.

By 0930 things had improved a lot, and we started again. This time the weather really was improving, and within an hour the last of the rain had stopped and the wind had dropped away completely. The sea was soon flat calm, so much so that as we approached Thaa Atoll we had a sighting of four **Dwarf Sperm Whales** – animals so undemonstrative that they are only ever seen in calm conditions. They dived as we approached, but we waited (spotting a **Manta Ray** behind the boat in the meantime) and 22 minutes later they popped up off to the side.

When the Dwarf Sperm Whales dived again, we headed on the outer reef of Thaa Atoll, for a late morning snorkel off Vilufushi Island. The reef here dropped away precipitously to the depths. Along the edge were numerous Table Corals, as well as occasional coral outcrops, under a couple of which **Nurse Sharks** were sleeping. There were also several **Hawksbill Turtles** and one large **Green Turtle**. Meanwhile in the shallows great grooves gouged out in the reef attested to the power of the sea on rough days, Also present characteristic fishes of this zone: **Surge Wrasse**, **Surge Damsels** and **Surge Hawkfish**.

Lunch was ready when we returned to *Hope Cruiser*. And straight after that we had a remarkably close sighting of a most obliging **Dwarf Sperm Whale**. There were also some

interesting seabirds including **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and **Sooty Tern**. But our next cetacean sighting was not until a bit later as we turned in to the atoll – a great school of **Spinner Dolphins** was heading out, with much activity en route.

We anchored in the harbour of a local fishing island, Dhiyamigili. That gave those who wanted the chance to walk ashore and see something of Maldivian village life (including some most impressive female volleyball players). For the rest, we headed out for a late snorkel on the nearby reef. It was not the clearest of sites, but there were some nice corals, plenty of fish, a **Hawksbill Turtle**, and the first of the night's **Featherstars** were emerging.

Evening talk: The great whales.

## Day 6, Monday 2 November

*Hope Cruiser* moved early this morning, out from the harbour at Dhiyamigili. We were heading for a small reef well inside the atoll, passing a pair of **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** on the way. The reef itself was a delight. There were fish aplenty including **Moray Eels** and **Whitetip Reef Sharks**. But it was the corals that stole the show. They were absolutely stupendous – just as one imagines a coral reef should be. There were **Table Corals**, **Staghorn Corals** and **Massive Corals**, all growing in glorious profusion.



*Powder-blue Surgeonfish*

As we left the reef **Spinner Dolphins** were spotted ahead, and we lingered with them until breakfast was ready. Then it was out into the deep Veimandhoo Channel south of Thaa Atoll. The sea was relatively calm and it all looked good for some great cetacean watching. But several frustrating hours followed. We spotted a **large baleen whale** (probably a Blue Whale) at some distance, but could not find it when we approached. Then a **Beaked Whale** was spotted, but although we waited we never saw it again. Then five smaller animals, likely **Dwarf Sperm Whales**, were spotted but they too disappeared without trace.

Luckily, our *dhoni* had stayed nearer the reef for fishing, and the crew called to say they had 'large dolphins' nearby. We moved inshore to join them, and sure enough we found them trailing a mixed group of **Pilot Whales** and **Bottlenose Dolphins**. The sea was flat calm by now, so we enjoyed a fabulous time with this group. The Bottlenose Dolphins were keen to bowride, both in front of the main boat, and on the dingy when a few went out to try their luck with underwater video.



*Pilot Whale*



*On the trail of the Bottlenose Dolphins*

Meanwhile the Pilot Whales were charging ahead, and *Hope Cruiser* went with them. We had them off to one side for a long time before they dropped behind. We then stopped to wait for them, and the Pilots then swam right by our stern, giving wonderful views. One large male had a distinctive white scar on the side of his face (perhaps from an encounter with Killer Whales), and should be easy to recognise if seen again.

By now we had followed the Pilots for several miles, and it was time to turn back on course. As we approached we could see **Fruit Bats** flying between the islands, and **Spinner Dolphins** heading out to sea.

We anchored in the narrow lagoon of the (as yet unfinished) domestic airport, close to the reef. So our evening snorkel was directly off the main boat. The light was fading on the reef, but we still enjoyed the reef life (including a frisky **Blacktip Reef Shark**) as the sun set.

Evening slide show: Marinelife cetacean surveys, presented by Adrian.

## Day 7, Tuesday 3 November

We left our anchorage early this morning, heading across to the island of Fonadhoo for a snorkel. On the way we passed two groups of **Spinner Dolphins**. Both were rather subdued, no doubt tired after their night of feeding, but some from the second larger group did bowride and spin.

Our snorkel was along the long house reef of Fonadhoo. The reef edge was thickly coated with corals, among which we saw several **Hawksbill Turtles** feeding. There was also a large **Napoleon Wrasse** and several **Clark's Anemonefishes**. The island itself provided a picture-perfect palm-fringed backdrop.



*Fonadhoo Island, Thaa Atoll*

Out at sea we were expecting good things, but despite the conditions (reasonable to start with, improving to excellent later on) we did not see a single cetacean. There were some nice birds though (including several **Tropical Shearwaters** and one gorgeous **White-tailed Tropicbird**) and plenty of **flying fish**.

Eventually it was time to turn in to the atoll. We were soon anchored in the natural harbour at Hirilandhoo. The dingy headed into the island, allowing a walk among the boat houses and fish processing yards. The *dhoni* headed out to a nearby reef for a snorkel on what turned out to be a coral wonderland. The corals were absolutely superb and took most of our attention. But among the many fishes were **Black-spotted Stingray**, **Giant Moray Eel**, and numerous schooling **Rabbitfishes** and **Fusiliers**.

Evening talk: Atoll formation, on the top deck under the night sky.

## Day 8, Wednesday 4 November

We started the day with a visit to another nearby reef, which proved just as good as last night's. The corals were wonderful: dense, diverse and beautiful. There were plenty of gorgeous reef fishes too, including a good selection of **Butterflyfishes** (**Bennett's**, **Meyer's**, **Yellow-headed**, and more) as well as a **Hawksbill Turtle** and a **Zebra Shark**.



*Acropora coral*

Back on *Hope Cruiser* breakfast was soon ready, after which three set out on the *dhoni* to try their luck fishing (trolling along the outer reef edge). The rest of us headed out into deep water on *Hope Cruiser*. We soon spotted a couple of local tuna fishing boats further offshore. They were fishing for large yellowfin tuna in association with a big mixed school of **Spotted and Spinner Dolphins**. There may have been about 500 dolphins in all, as well as a noisy flock of birds, including **Sooty Tern**, **Brown Noddy**, **Lesser Noddy**, **Tropical Shearwater** and **Flesh-footed Shearwater**. The fishermen were hooking **Yellowfin Tuna**, and their boats fell behind as they hauled them in. We kept up with the front of the school, so had a near-constant parade of dolphins under our bows and seabirds overhead.

After a full hour with this spectacular school we moved on, to rejoin the *dhoni*. The fishermen had had some luck too, with a total catch of seven fish.



*Tropical Shearwater*

Later, after lunch, we ran into a series of schools of **Risso's Dolphins**. They were all logging at the surface, but allowed us to approach closely and enjoy some marvellous views. Although they were mostly quiet, there was some breaching and spy-hopping and also some characteristic lifting of tails.



*Risso's Dolphin*

Finally heading in towards the atoll, we anchored next to the idyllic little island of Kandufushi. We were soon in the *dhoni* heading for the reef. Some jumped straight in for a snorkel, others transferred to the dingy for a run ashore to the island. The reef was again wonderful, although the moderate current made snorkelling a little more energetic than we had become used to. While on the island, **Fruit Bats** and **Grey Herons** kept the photographers busy. Returning to *Hope Cruiser* we came across a school of **Spinner Dolphins** which bowrode obligingly, plus a **Hawksbill Turtle**. While back onboard, the crew told us that a **Manta** had been swimming around the boat.

Evening talk: Bycatch in Indian Ocean tuna fisheries

## Day 9, Thursday 5 November

When we awoke, there was not a breath of wind and the sea was mirror calm. We were soon heading across to the small island of Kandufushi for a walk and/or snorkel. Those on the island had the chance to photograph **Fruit Bats**. While those snorkelling enjoyed the wonderful corals and reef fishes. The water was thick with jellies, of non-stinging varieties: mostly thick strings of **Salps**, with the occasional **Moon Jellyfish**.



*Snorkelling off Kandufushi Island*

With breakfast still on the table we set off, out into the open ocean. The sea was still calm, and during the day we had some excellent encounters with large schools of both **Spinner Dolphins** (which bowrode, up to 12 at a time) and **Risso's Dolphins** (which breached and did head-stands). We also enjoyed some nice seabird sightings, including several **Tropical Shearwaters** around the boat, as well as **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and **Wilson's Storm-petrel** both heading south, and **Sooty Terns** and **Great Crested Terns** overhead.

Eventually it was time to turn in, and we anchored in the shelter of a large turquoise reef near Hulhudheli island. We were soon on the *dhoni* for a snorkel, on the nearest part of the reef. Compared to what we had become used to in the last few days, the corals were not the best, although they were still very good. However, the fish-life was superb with a great diversity of reef species, including **Blacktip**

and **Whitetip Reef Sharks**, **Giant Moray** and dinner-plate-sized **Lined Butterflyfish**. There were some nice invertebrates out too, including a good selection of **Featherstars** and several **Coriocella** (purple, knobby velvet snails).

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

## Day 10, Friday 10 October

For our morning snorkel we headed well south of our anchorage, aiming for a small reef inside the atoll. However, the sea was so calm that it was like a mirror, and we simply could not see the reef we were looking for! But there were plenty of larger reefs nearby, and we soon settled on one. It was a good choice. The water was a lovely clear blue, and the corals were, once again, absolutely fantastic. The fish-life was not bad either, with **Rockmover Wrasse**, a wide variety of **Butterflyfishes**, schools of **Powder-blue Surgeonfish**, and much more besides.

Back on *Hope Cruiser*, after breakfast, three transferred back to the *dhoni* for a chance of some fishing along the reef. On the main boat we headed offshore, and soon spotted a **Dwarf Sperm Whale**, which actually allowed us to approach relatively closely.

Just before lunch the fishers returned, with three **Jacks**. And at lunch there was another **Dwarf Sperm Whale**. There were increasing numbers of seabirds too, with several **Tropical Shearwaters** trailing our boat, as well as **Great Crested Terns** and **Brown Noddies** plus **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and **Wilson's Storm-petrel**.

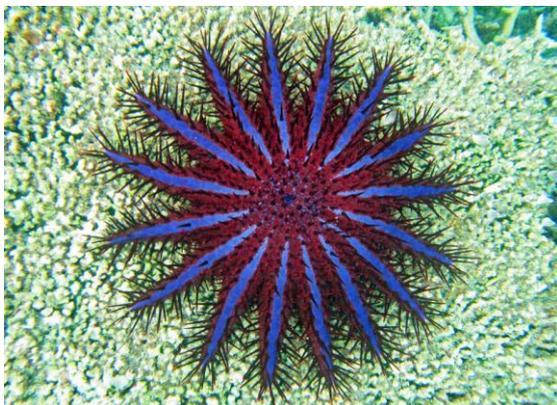
Later we found a large school of **Spinner Dolphins** and spent plenty of time with them. They were wide awake, and readily bowrode (up to 20 at a time) as well as spinning all around.

By now it was nearly time to turn in to our anchorage. As we anchored a group of **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins** swam by. We jumped into the *dhoni*, and soon had them bowriding. Then we diverted to the adjacent reef for our snorkel. It was overcast and getting late, so the light was low. But the corals and fishes were as wonderful as ever.

Evening slide show: Beaked whales

## Day 11, Saturday 7 November

There was no escaping the weather today: it was wet and windy all day. After waking we waited some time to see if the clouds would break, but it soon became apparent that we were in for a long spell of rain and wind. So we set off, travelling inside Faafu Atoll to the delightful uninhabited island of Makunueri, where we anchored in the lee for our morning snorkel. The reef here looked as though it had been in excellent condition until very recently. But there were many **Crown-of-thorns Starfish** all over the reef, and their depredations were only too apparent. There were numerous dead **Table Corals**, but not a single living one. Perhaps half of the branching *Acropora* corals were also recently dead. Crown-of-thorns are notorious coral-eaters, and seeing their handiwork is never welcome, but it is a natural part of the ecology of coral reefs.



*Crown-of-thorns Starfish*

Back of board *Hope Cruiser* we finished breakfast before setting off. The wind was still blowing, and we were anticipating a choppy crossing to Vaavu Atoll. In the event it was not as rough as expected, and half way across we had a thrilling encounter with a large school of **Spinner Dolphins**. They were charging westwards, leaping across the waves with gusto.

Once we reached Vaavu, we anchored for lunch, before continuing on to Fulidhoo Island. On the way we passed a school of perhaps 20 **Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphins**. There were several seabirds too, including **Saunders's Tern, Great Crested Tern** and **Brown Noddy**.

The rain continued all the time we were travelling inside Vaavu Atoll, right up to when we anchored at Fulidhoo. There was then just time for a quick snorkel on a nearby reef. Despite the fading light the visibility was excellent. The reef was plastered with **Table Corals**, including one giant specimen nearly 3m across. There were also plenty of fish, including a large school of **Yellow-lined Goatfish**, and a **Hawksbill Turtle**.

Every night we had enjoyed the presence of different fishes, and the occasional squid, off the stern of the boats, attracted by the powerful spotlights. Tonight there was a particularly good display of small fishes, some chased right up onto the stern platform itself by marauding predators.

Evening talk: Dragonflies and Indonesia. Followed by a magnificent Maldivian buffet.

## Day 12, Sunday 8 November

Our final, full day. The sun was shining brightly when we awoke, which made a pleasant change from the constant overcast of yesterday. It was back to 'Table-coral-reef' for this morning's snorkel. And in the morning

sunlight, the corals looked even better than before.

Before we left our anchorage at Fulidhoo we were visited by a small gang of **House Crows**: an endemic subspecies unique to the Maldives. Appropriately enough we also heard an **Asian Koel** calling from the island: this cuckoo is a brood parasite of the House Crow.



*Maldivian House Crow*

The channel crossing to South Malé was fairly choppy, but not so rough that we could not keep a lookout. And as a result we had a wonderful sighting of a large mixed school of **Spotted and Spinner Dolphins**, charging westwards into the on-coming current.

A bit later, in the lee of the atoll, we had a brief sighting of a **Dwarf Sperm Whale** (and a couple of other unidentified fins nearby). And a bit later still a final sighting of **Spinner Dolphins**. By now Malé was in sight, and it was time to head in to our final anchorage.

After anchoring at Hulumalé there was time to say a heartfelt ‘thank you’ to the crew for looking after us all so well, and for a group photo on the fore deck. Then sad farewells, and the first transfers to the airport, with the rest following after dinner.

## CETACEAN SUMMARY

Over our twelve days we recorded a respectable total of 10 different species (with two others probable), from 51 sightings (which made 54 records since two species were seen together on three occasions):

Species	Scientific Name	No. Sightings	Est. no. Individuals
Spinner Dolphins	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	22	2060
Spotted Dolphins	<i>Stenella attenuata</i>	4	600
Striped Dolphins	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	1	35
Risso's Dolphins	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	4	136
Common Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	1	30
Indopacific Bottlenose Dolphins	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	4	34
Rough-tooth Dolphins	<i>Steno bredanensis</i>	1	5
Shortfin Pilot Whales	<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	1	8
Killer Whales	<i>Orcinus orca</i>	1	4
Dwarf Sperm Whale	<i>Kogia sima</i>	7	10
Probable Longman's Beaked	<i>Indopacetus pacificus</i>	1	4
Probable Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	1	1
Unidentified Beaked Whale	Ziphiidae	3	5
Unidentified cetaceans		3	14
		54	2946



Killer Whales

## BIRDS

Twenty species of birds is a reasonable total for the Maldives. Of particular note were our sightings of Wilson's Storm-petrel and Flesh-footed Shearwater on southward migration.

1	Tropical Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bailloni</i>
2	Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus carneipes</i>
3	Wilson's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
4	White-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>
5	Frigatebird	<i>Fregata</i> sp.
6	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
7	Maldivian Little Heron	<i>Butorides striata didii</i>
8	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucas</i>
9	Saunders's Tern	<i>Sterna saundersi</i>
10	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
11	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</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	Bridled Tern	<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>
16	Sooty Tern	<i>Sterna fuscata</i>
17	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
18	Lesser Noddy	<i>Anous tenuirostris</i>
19	Asian Koel (heard)	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
20	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens maledivicus</i>

## ANCHORAGES

Day 1	28 Oct 2015	Guraidhoo	(South Malé Atoll)
Day 2	29 Oct 2015	Fotheyo	(Vaavu Atoll)
Day 3	30 Oct 2015	Dhiggaru	(Meemu Atoll)
Day 4	31 Oct 2015	Kolhuvaariyafushi	(Meemu Atoll)
Day 5	1 Nov 2015	Dhiyamigili	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 6	2 Nov 2015	Hiriyanfushi	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 7	3 Nov 2015	Hirilandhoo	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 8	4 Nov 2015	Kandufushi	(Thaa Atoll)
Day 9	5 Nov 2015	Hulhudheli	(Dhaalu Atoll)
Day 10	6 Nov 2015	Minimasgali	(Faafu Atoll)
Day 11	7 Nov 2015	Fulidhoo	(Vaavu Atoll)
Day 12	8 Nov 2015	Hulumalé	(Malé Atoll)

## CONTACT DETAILS

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