

# BLUE & GREEN LAAMU

*Marine Biology & Sustainability Newsletter*

July 2020



SIX SENSES

LAAMU

A cowtail stingray explores the shallows of Six Senses Laamu's spa beach. In July the resort announced it will reopen on August 1st. After a four month temporary closure, the team can't wait to welcome guests again.



## TRAINING FOR REOPENING

In the middle of July, it was announced that Six Senses Laamu would be reopening on the 1st August, 2020. After a four month closure, Six Senses conducted a vast range of trainings to refresh our hosts, ensuring everyone was ready to welcome guests back.

Lawrence (Guest Education Coordinator) and Adam (Education and Community Outreach Manager) conducted trainings in Sustainability and Plastic. Sustainability reminded hosts about the initiatives we have here at Six Senses Laamu to help us either produce zero waste, or to turn our waste into wealth, as well as the research, education, and community engagement the Maldives Underwater Initiative conducts through the Sustainability Fund. The Plastic training is the third module of a series, focusing on the effect plastics can have on human health and exploring what hosts can do to be part of the solution. Over 80 hosts were trained in both topics over 6 sessions.



Not only have we been working together to make sure all our staff are up to date with recent protocols, we have also been working with Deep Blue Divers to promote some new regulations. Many guests travel to Six Senses Laamu to experience the underwater world of diverse marine life through either diving or snorkeling.

Following the COVID pandemic, new scuba diving recommendations have been put in place by PADI and Divers Alert Network (DAN), suggesting that all those who have experienced COVID-19 or symptoms, as a respiratory virus, have a medical examination before arriving for their diving holiday. Furthermore, those taking a course are advised to complete the theory online- minimizing time spent in the classroom. We worked with the dive center to think of [some fun and quirky ways to relay this message](#), and make sure our guests have a personal, unique and safe diving experience.

### Planning your dream dive holiday?



See our new protocols to make your trip safe, personal and unique!

## PLASTIC FREE JULY

It was Plastic Free July last month! Six Senses Laamu is already fantastic at not using Plastic, but there are always areas that we can improve on, especially with many hosts going back home and being surrounded by different plastic-use cultures. We organized an island-wide plastic clean, focusing on our beaches, which had a lot of plastic washed up from other islands. The sacks used to collect rubbish also happened to be the perfect size for a sack race to finish the day! We also ran a plastic challenge on the host Facebook page encouraging our hosts to find an alternative, or not use plastic for an entire day.



### Junior Marine Biology Program



## UPDATING THE JUNIOR MARINE BIOLOGY PROGRAM

MUI's Junior Marine Biology (JMB) program was turned into a free [online format](#) during the closure of Six Senses Laamu, but with an imminent re-opening, it was time to review and redesign our original JMB program.

Lawrence has been working very hard on making the program more impactful, more fun, and with many more activities. We already have some families booking in August, so it looks like Lawrence won't have to wait very long before he has some eager children ready to join the MUI team and become Junior Marine Biologists!



# SUSTAINABILITY & COMMUNITY

## A REDESIGNED ORGANIC GARDEN READY FOR GUESTS

Whilst the resort has been temporarily closed, the Organic Garden team at Six Senses Laamu has been busy redesigning the Organic Garden to create experiences that would educate, inspire and 'wow' guests. July was the final push and, in time for our August 1st reopening, we now have a beautiful new garden we can't wait to show guests on the Back of House Tours. Two highlights include the banana garden and our raised beds.



### Banana garden

Banana plants are fairly easy to grow and they have a long-life expectancy, making them a key crop in our Organic Garden. Thus, the team has decided to prioritize these plants and, in the redesign, they replaced the old banana trees with the new ones. It's just been a few weeks but we've already seen the banana blossoms! Even though banana trees are a priority for the garden, the team has also planted Alovera, ginger, turmeric and many more herbs.



### Raised beds

A raised bed, by definition, is a garden bed that is built up instead of down. Gardening can come with many challenges such as roots from other trees getting in the way or back pain from regular weed cleaning. By raising the beds above the ground, these challenges are avoided so the roots go unobstructed and our gardeners can stand tall. The team has built a total number of 14 raised beds which will be used for planting herbs, especially those which are sensitive to roots.

## LEARN HOW TO PLANT SUGARCANE

Sugarcane is in the same family as grass, and grows in the form of tall, narrow stalks, or canes. The Organic Garden team at Six Senses Laamu grows sugarcane in a small scale and the sugarcane juice is offered to guests during a sugarcane tasting activity at the garden. One of the most important health benefits of sugarcane juices is that it is a diuretic which means it helps treat urinary tract infections, kidney stones and ensure proper functioning of the kidneys.

Sugarcane is an easy plant to grow, let's have a look at the process together and you might be able to grow your own at home. There are number of ways you can plant sugarcane but our gardener Baithul will show you how he has planted sugarcane in the Organic Garden of Six Senses Laamu.



### Step 1

Get a couple of sugarcane sticks and cut them into smaller pieces which are approximately 10 to 12 inches. The sticks have joints and you should observe carefully for the buds at the joints. Ensure you have more than 2 buds in each sugarcane stick you are about to plant.

### Step 2

Since sugarcane is in the same family as grass, its major source of compost should be nitrogen. Once you add enough composts in the soil, ensuring it is moist, loosen up the soil with your hands. Dig a trench in the bed which is about 4 inches deep and the same length of the sugarcane stick you are about to plant.



### Step 3

When you place the sugarcane sticks in the bed make sure that the buds are facing upwards. If the buds aren't all on the same side of the sugarcane stick, find at least two buds which face close to the same direction and ensure these are facing upwards. If you face the buds downwards they might not be able to grow. If you are planting more than one stick, you should give at least one and half feet of space between the sticks. Finally, cover the sticks with sand. Within 12 days you should see the plants emerging from the sand. Make sure not to give the crops excess water whilst they are growing.



## CITIZEN SCIENCE

While the Manta Trust team aims to join all guest dives to the manta aggregation sites, sometimes manta rays surprise us and show up unexpectedly in Laamu! Since the Manta Trust team can't join every dive from the resort, guests and resort staff are essential in helping us collect data. In 2019, we received submissions of more than 50 ID photos for our research in Laamu!

Anyone can be a citizen scientist, and all you need to do is capture a photo of a manta ray's unique ventral spot pattern. The images allow for the identification of individual manta rays, and our team will then add the information to our database. When diving the Manta Trust, guests receive details on swimming with manta rays and learn how to get involved with citizen science and capture ID photos. While the briefings are shared with guests diving at the aggregation sites, we hope that the information is useful to them when diving at the other sites in Laamu and around the world!

Guests at the resort can submit their manta ray ID photos directly to staff or email them to [laamu@mantatrust.org](mailto:laamu@mantatrust.org)

To learn more about taking ID photos, visit the [Manta Trust website](#) and you can read about how to swim with manta rays [here](#).



## GIANTS OF LAAMU

The MMRP has measured mantas in Laamu for the past few years. As of June 2019, 96 measurements of manta rays have been analyzed from the atoll using a stereo video camera system. This camera system allows researchers to swim behind a manta ray and record two videos that can later be analyzed for a disc width measurement.

The results are in, and the largest manta recorded in Laamu so far is Dinayan, an adult female known to the atoll since 2014. She's not a manta ray that we frequently see, but when she cruises through or comes in for a clean, she can't be missed measuring in at 3.69 meters across! Most of the manta rays in Laamu are adult females, and many of them are close to 3.5 meters. This makes the male mantas look quite small (averaging about 2.9 meters) in comparison at the cleaning stations!

We'll be continuing to measure manta rays throughout the rest of 2020 and can't wait to give you an update on the results of the research!





## VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR THE LAAMASEELU MASVERIYA PROGRAM

In July, the BLUE team made great progress on the Laamaseelu Masveriya program and are now ready to install vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on local fishing boats. The Laamaseelu Masveriya program, meaning exemplary fishermen in Dhivehi, is a sustainable reef fishing program which was launched by BLUE and Six Senses Laamu in January 2020. Eight fishermen have signed a code of conduct to ensure all fish served at Six Senses Laamu are caught sustainably. The program also helps promote sustainable fishing practices throughout Laamu's communities.



Overfishing is arguably one of the largest threats to our oceans. Overfishing occurs when more fish are caught than can be replenished by existing fish stock. In the Maldives, coral reef ecosystems are highly vulnerable to overfishing as most of commercially exploited reef fish take several years to mature and reproduce. In addition, there aren't many regulations and laws in place to manage the reef fisheries in the Maldives.

As a part of the program, fishermen collect fish landing data for research and each fishing boat will be installed with VMS. These monitoring devices will help us collect accurate data on fishing location and fishing effort, which would be a crucial information for establishing a marine reserve in the area. In July, the BLUE team dedicated a huge amount of time to further researching the VMS options and are now getting ready to trial it on fishing boats in Laamu.



## FINALIZING RESOURCE USE SURVEYS

As the Maldives slowly adapts to the new normal, the BLUE team is getting ready to do resource use surveys in Laamu atoll. The surveys will be conducted in all 11 local islands and will look into how natural resources are being utilized by the Laamu community, Island councils, nonprofit organizations and businesses. The BLUE team have been working on finalizing the questionnaires and translating the questions to local language, Dhivehi. The surveys are planned to commence later this year.

The findings from these surveys will play a significant role in setting up the marine protected area in the atoll. It will also be available to authorities and other organizations to be used for atoll development plans.





## OLIVE RIDLEY PROJECT

### THE OTHER SIDE OF SCIENCE

Given the continued restrictions on photo ID surveys and the recent lull in nesting activity at Six Senses Laamu, Olive Ridley Project focussed on report writing throughout much of July. Although report writing is sometimes considered the downside of a career in science, reports are crucial to assess and share progress, determine trends, and guide future research. In July, ORP drafted a report detailing the nesting research conducted at Six Senses Laamu and Gaadhoo, and a report describing ORPs research in Laamu during the 2019-20 partnership year. Keep an eye out for ORPs nesting and partnership year reports on the MUI website in the coming weeks.



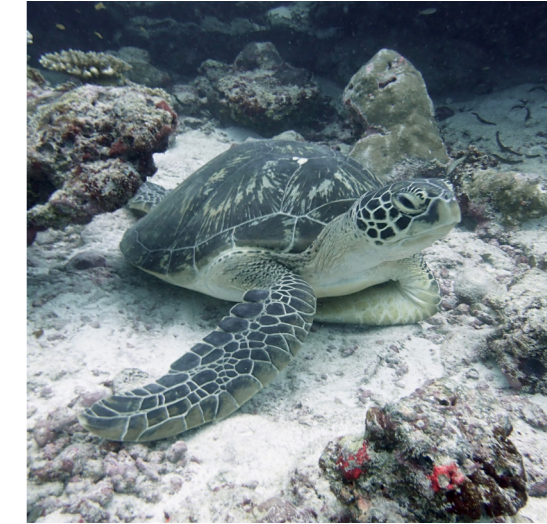
### PREPARATION FOR REOPENING

In preparation for Six Senses Laamu reopening, this month ORP spent time refreshing guest resources and activities. ORP also explored some exciting technological advances for monitoring turtle nests; stay tuned for more information in future editions of Blue and Green.



### SEA TURTLES IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DAVINA AND CAPONE

Davina is one of our most frequently sighted green turtles in Laamu. She is often found hanging out with the mantas at our local cleaning station, Hithadhoo Corner. Davina is normally a pretty relaxed turtle and is often spotted sat in huge patches of her favorite food - seagrass. However, Davina can also be a bit of a show-off; at times when divers are seemingly more interested in the mantas, she has been known to swim laps of the cleaning station to make sure that guests notice her! She is a firm favorite among guests and hosts at Six Senses Laamu.



Capone is our turtle biologist's favorite turtle. He is endearingly clumsy and seems to constantly bump into things - including us! He is frequently spotted searching for sponges in and amongst the reef. Sometimes, he is so focussed on this task - head in the coral, bum in the air - that the strong currents at Hithadhoo Corner flip him over! He disappeared for a few months last year and returned recently with a few war wounds to his carapace. We're unsure as to what caused these injuries - we can't rule out his clumsiness - but thankfully the injuries don't appear to affect his day-to-day activities.

To learn more about Six Senses Laamu marine conservation and sustainability initiatives please contact:

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To stay up to date with the latest news, events and visiting experts follow **Six Senses Laamu, Maldives Underwater Initiative and Deep Blue Divers** on social media



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