

ACCM - ZAVORA MARINE LAB. NEWSLETTER

As seems to be the trend, our newsletter is again way overdue. But such is the life of busy researchers! There are divers to be watched, whales to be counted, mantas to be identified, nudis to be found, beaches to be cleaned and buildings to be planned. The day just doesn't have enough hours and the weeks not enough days. We hope you will forgive us and enjoy our little update from our extremely tough life as scientists in Zavora ;)



Incredible Humpback whales

The first humpback sighting of the season occurred on the 6th of June when we spotted two whales at the surface coming back from our dives, and since then the bay has been an extremely busy playground for these wonderful giants. This year, as last, we have been studying relative migratory patterns and distribution by counting numbers of whales passing through or spending time in the bay, meaning hours of carefully surveying the bay with binoculars and notepads at hand. Every other day, from 6 am till dark, we have been observing behaviour and noting travelling routes of, on certain days, more than 30 groups! We have witnessed some extraordinary breaches, vigorous tail slaps and playful calves – it truly is a privilege being able to observe them so closely. The main concentration of whales has been in what we have called 'zone 4', which is the area outside the Rock Pool reef. The continuation of the research in the following years will allow us to better understand and to monitor the humpback whales using Zavora Bay.

We have also introduced photo ID of humpback tail flukes to our research, and although this has proved to be a little more challenging, we have still managed to acquire a few good shots which can identify the individual. Because good fluke shots are so rare to come across, we are hoping those of you who have managed to snap a good picture along the Mozambican coast this season will kindly donate your photo to our research. On our new website for humpback whales in Mozambique www.mozwhales.com you can have a look at the type of picture we are looking for and send them to yara@zavoralab.com. We are as always grateful for any contribution!

Also worth mentioning is that the curiosity of these gentle giants have certainly proved itself on more than one occasion this year. Several times whales have approached us while we have been snorkelling, giving lucky interns and divers a very memorable experience, and on the 26th of September, divers encountered a pod of at least 9 whales during their dive on Witch's Hat! The whales were extremely curious and also playful and were thought to be mimicking the divers behaviour, blowing bubbles and rolling when the divers rolled over on their backs! A once in a lifetime experience for both divers and whales we would imagine! MozDivers Instructor Juan Vega's amazing pics prove just how close they came!

Almost 200 Mantas and a new website

Since the middle of May, our inshore reefs have been absolutely teeming with Mantas. We have of course taken every opportunity to get out in the field to spend time with them, something that has boosted our Manta ID database! Our database now contains close to 200 identified individuals, about 60% of them female, with a majority of Reef Mantas. So far we have encountered only seven re-sightings indicating that the manta population in Zavora is much bigger than we thought. Should you have a belly picture of a Manta taken in Mozambique – anywhere in Mozambique, we'd appreciate if you emailed it to us with date and location, as we are very keen to find out where the Zavora Mantas go on vacations!

Our new manta ray website, sponsored by EcoCiencia, is now being designed by the computer programmer Roberto Jr and should be ready to launch any day now. The website is following the basis of the software developed by our research associate and oceanographer Carlos E. J. De A. Tibirica, and will allow you to upload your own manta pictures and check if it's an identified manta or not. www.mantaid.org is the website to look out for!



Nudi news

You might have noticed that Nudibranchs hold a special place in ZML's heart, and that we on any possible occasion will pack up camera, measuring tape and magnifying glass and head for the rock pool or other suitable sites in search of new opisthobranch species. More often than not our quests are successful and we return to base with one or more new species to identify, photograph, and preserve. Our Opisthobranch database contains 120 species and counting, some of them yet undescribed.

Also the nudis now have their own website – www.mozslugs.com where we will be listing the nudibranchs found in Zavora, as well as allowing the general public to post their nudi-pics from around Mozambique and get a positive identification of the slug. This will not only be a tool for nudibranch enthusiasts around the country, or the world for that matter, but also a valuable resource for our current studies.



Marine Science Conference in Kenya

The 7th WIOMSA (Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association) scientific symposium 2011 will be held in Mombasa, Kenya and we will be going up to present a few of our projects. Yara and long term intern Sabrina will be presenting our work of fish assessment in Zavora. This is very valuable research in terms of recognising the species in Mozambiquan waters. Our list containing 251 species is invaluable in that sense that hardly any research has previously been conducted in Zavora, and also because we have found 17 species previously never before recorded in Mozambique – one of them even thought to be endemic to the Kwa-Zulu Natal area in South Africa.

Our researcher associate Carlos will together with Yara be presenting our Manta identification software – an invaluable resource for our Manta ID work. The 3rd version of the software has just been realised and allows us check with even higher precision whether our manta pictures are new or re-sight.

International Coastal Clean Up Day

Since May we have been organising beach clean up on a monthly basis. Every second Sunday of the month, we invite local community, school, stakeholders and tourist to come and help us clean the beach. For the month of September, we swapped around the days to be able to correlate with the International Coastal Clean Up. On Saturday the 17th of September beaches and dive sites all around the world were emptied of trash, and so were the beach here in Zavora. Despite having another project they needed to attend to that day, close to 50 kids from the local school came to the beach to help us with the clean up. We divided in to groups and headed each our direction from the Zavora lodge ramp. After some initial confusion as to what was trash and what was not – we took the palm leaves, shells and fish heads out from the bags again – the kids eagerly ran along filling their bags with bottles, tooth brushes, floats for nets, nets and underwear! We also found a plastic bag from Argentina which we filled with a chocolate wrapper from Mexico, sun cream bottles from the US and plastic crates from China! Rubbish sure travels a long way... After an hour about 15 bags were full and the beach once again looked like a beach should!

We are very grateful to the local school and the kids for donating their time every month, but at the same time we are a little disappointed to see the lack of engagement from the stakeholders around Zavora. But we're not letting that stop us - we will continue to clean the beach - alone or together - until people learn not to litter and there is no more rubbish to remove!



Inhassoro

On the weekend of the 6th and 7th of October Yara, on behalf of the ACCM, was invited to the village of Inhassoro as the main speaker at an educational community project focusing on sustainable tourism and ocean conservation. The event was arranged by Italian NGO CeLIM, who arranges these types of events for the community of Inhassoro on a weekly basis.

Inhassoro is a village the size of Inharrime (although surprisingly enough it there's no less than 48 lodges to choose from for the few tourists who make their way there!). It is situated 60km north of Vilanculos, and lies in a sheltered bay along a wonderful stretch of white sand beach. The protected Santa Carolina Island is a 2 hour fishing boat trip away, a place certainly worth visiting as there are few tourists to devour the crystal clear blue water and wonderful off-the-beach snorkelling. Currents can be a little strong, but that's a completely different story...

On the first evening, after some educational movies, Yara talked about sustainable tourism and the positive and negative impacts tourism might have on the community. Yara was followed by local lawyer who spoke about the different laws that applies to beach and ocean based tourism (eg driving on the beach, where and how to build) and then Gabriel from CeLIM did a presentation on sustainable building practices and materials, which were very educational for us who are about to commence our own building!

The following evening Yara spoke about key marine species and the importance of conservation and sustainable fishing.



Both nights educational program ended with local a theatre group from the local school, who presented, to the big enjoyment of the spectators, a play on sustainable tourism, and on the following night a play on what they had learned the night before, before eventually local DJs got the crowds bouncing till the early morning hours.

The event drew around 100 people both nights, and it was really exciting for us to be able to share our passion for conservation outside of Zavora, as well as making contacts with likeminded NGOs. These are the kind of events we are hoping to be able to host in Zavora as well as soon as we have our research centre. A big thanks to CeLIM for having us and showing us their wonderful community!



Interns

Our internship is becoming increasingly popular, and for the winter months of June, July and August all the available internship spaces were filled. This has been an incredible resource for us, especially with all the whales and manta spending time in the area.

The interns have been spending a lot of time watching and surveying whales, photographing and identifying manta rays, they have collected data for our manta ray/diver interaction research and they have meticulously stalked divers during their dive to survey impacts on the reef! We would like to reward a HUGE thank you to all our interns for their help, effort, time and dedication – without their support we wouldn't have a chance to accomplish all our valuable research. We are also really appreciative that some of them even donate their time after they get back home, to help us analyse data and write reports. Well done and thank you so much all of you!

Previous intern Kristien Vanpoucke has finished her master thesis, in which she did a very interesting discussion evaluating diving tourism and shark finning as new alternatives of economic income for local communities in Zavora. Her analysis evaluates cultural, environmental and economic aspects. Interested in reading it? It is available for download from our website www.zavoralab.com



BUILDING PROJECT

Building

The building of our new research and education centre on our land is taking even further steps towards being realised. After several months of waiting, we finally got the legal right to use the land (DUAT), and with next weeks digging of the water hole we can declare the project officially started! We have been lucky enough to get eco-architect Andreea Gross from Lanzarote on board, and she is now finalising the plans so that building can commence within the next few months.

The main building will contain an education meeting room, where we can receive locals, visitors and international students alike for weekly talks, classes, movies and seminars. It will also have space for both wet and dry labs where we can do our research in an inspiring environment especially designed for this purpose. This has been the major lack in our working environment so far, and we are very excited about it! Our grounds will also house up to 6 interns, both national and international, who will have their own quarters out back with kitchen attached.

It is of course our top priority to build sustainable as well as practical and strong, and we will be using materials like coconut, glass bottles, earth bricks and others local resources. For sanitation we will be making dry toilets, showers with water treatment and natural solar heating. We are extremely excited about the plans, but we will be needing some help from kind people around the world.

Photo credits

All underwater photos + intern and kids outside the dive center are photographed by Juan Vega, Yara took the Beach Clean up group photo, whilst the Beach Clean pics taken at the beach + photos from Inhassoro are by Steven Leeming.

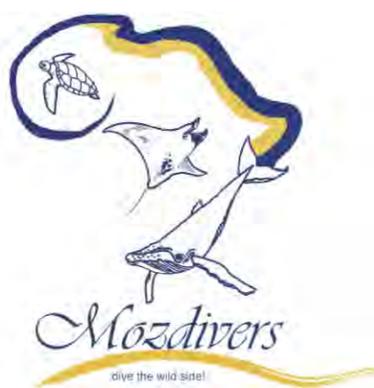
How can you get involved??

-Donate air miles! Andreea is kindly donating her time and knowledge, but unfortunately tickets to fly from Spain to Mozambique, so she can help us onsite, are expensive. Should you have any airmiles about to expire, or that you would like to donate anyway, please contact us so that we can help Andreea come to Zavora and help us!

-Donate bottles! We need 7000 bottles for the building of a glass bottles wall. The Alma project in Tofo is involving the local community in collecting and recycling rubbish that is again sold to recycling stations in Maputo or South Africa, but for a lot of materials and products there is yet no way to recycle. Certain bottles are amongst these products, so what we would like to do is to work with Alma to collect these bottles and pay the locals involved the price they would normally get for other recyclable bottles. We'd really appreciate your help with this – 100 bottles cost 5 Euro, your money will go to the ALMA team and the bottles will go to our hall! If you would like to sponsor 100 bottles, please email yara@zavoralab.com for donation details.

-Support us with building materials. Unfortunately we don't have any official sponsors yet, so donations of any kind are more than welcome. Building materials are expensive in Mozambique as in most other countries of the world. Should you like to help us get materials for our important research and education centre, please email yara@zavoralab.com for details.

-Volunteer! We'd love Andreea to stay with us during the whole building, but even if she could, she can't build it all by herself. So we need someone with building knowledge (architecture or engineer) to help with the building of the centre and supervising and instructing other workers. If you are skilled in construction work and would like to make this dream real please contact us. We can provide basic food and accommodation in return!



This was what we had to share with you for this time! We hope you enjoyed our short newsletter, and that it inspired you to get out there and do something for the oceans in one way or another - whether it is cleaning a beach, supporting a conservation project, or simply diving and sharing your love for the ocean and marine life with others! Thanks for reading, and until next time - happy bubbles!

Should you have any questions or comments, please contact us!

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