

# ACCM NEWSLETTER

It's been a great winter season with plenty of Mantas cleaning their way across our reefs and the tune of a Humpback accompanying pretty much every dive. And if winter has been fantastic, spring has been nothing but outstanding! Some days offered 30 meter viz in clear blue water teeming with activity making it even easier to show our divers why we love Zavora so much! On one day we even dived Deep Reef South twice, as we didn't have time to see it all in one go. More than 50 Devil Rays cruised past, Small Eyed stingrays and Mantas fought for our attention, even the Bowmouth guitarfish came out for a rare visit. We saw Turtles, Morays, Potato Groupers, White Tips and Black Tips, and a Hammerhead. And when we eventually bent our sore necks back to face the reef, we found a Seagrass Ghost Pipefish. diving really doesn't get much better than this!

With all the action going on in the water, we've been pressed for time to do anything else! We've still managed, and here's our report of what's been going on.



## Mantas

For the past few months we've had high concentrations of plankton in the water, which means plenty food for Manta Rays! This season they have been concentrated on the Red Sands area cleaning stations, and lucky divers have been pretty much guaranteed sightings. We have of course been out there with our cameras, trying to get positive ID of as many individuals as possible, and our efforts have resulted in XX new mantas for our database! We have also had a re-sight of an individual who were identified here in Zavora in 200?.



## Nudis

You're not gonna get away from hearing about nudis this time either! Our love for these tiny little slugs is as great as ever, as we keep finding more and more! Lately we have been focusing on the tiniest of the tiny, the once you would never see just by looking at it. By collecting and meticulously going through substrate, we have been able to catalogue about 50? New species, most of them not much more than a couple of mm. This could not have been possible had it not been for our newest toys – macro flashes and microscope adaptors, allowing us to get clear and close up photos of even the most miniscule slugs. Our database now counts 200? Species, but as far as we're concerned there's no reason to stop at that, as we believe that Zavora bay still has plenty secrets hiding within its nooks and crevices!



## Humpback Whales

Early in June we started seeing the first Humpback Whales migrating north. We started our surveying in July, and have been doing whale watching for 12 hours a day every other day since. As always, it's been amazing! We have witnessed mothers guiding their young calves, teaching them rolling and breaching, we have seen courting behaviour and we have had big heavy adults simultaneously tail slapping their way across the bay. One of the things we have noticed is that slapping with pectoral fins seems to be a behaviour almost only seen in groups where a calf is present. Why is this? We would also love to know!

On the most hectic days we have seen more than 100 groups within vicinity, travelling, playing or resting in and around the bay. We have also been out to sea trying to get some identifying pictures of tail flukes, and although a challenging task we have managed to ID a few.

This year Dunes de Dovela eco-lodge initiated 'Humpback whale weekends' dedicated to one of the most incredible mammals in the ocean, with educational talks, movies and of course ocean safaris in order for the public to gain a greater understanding of these animals. The weekends have become a great success, the whales have been on their best behaviour, but then again, with the surroundings and atmosphere at Dunes de Dovela it can hardly go wrong.

## Ocean Safari

With so many whales in the area, Ocean Safari is the highlight of the trip for many of the visitors to Zavora. This year as last a lucky few have been greeted by whales whilst in the water – on one amazing occasion a young calf came over for a 10 minute long play while they mum was supervising/ getting some me-time in the distance. And it hasn't only been about the whales. We have been spotting more and more whale sharks around Zavora, and these giants are of course a favourite for many. There has been plenty opportunities for getting in the water with the sharks as they effortlessly torpedo through the waters with exhausted snorkelers in tow, as keeping pace with a whale shark is by far as easy as it seems! Luckily we have trained our animals well, so they stick around till everyone has had a look, and pose for a few photos before they're off!



## Conservation Matters

Unfortunately, we don't have only happy, incredible underwater stories to share this time. In Zavora, as in a lot of places across our planet, the understanding of the eco-system is long gone and changing fishing practices other coastal activities are putting a higher pressure than ever on some of the most vulnerable ocean species. We would like to put some focus on some of the latest happenings, not only to inform, but also for all of us to be able to share ideas on how we can find a solution to the problem. We encourage every one of you to have a think, and share your thoughts with us. Those of you who are doing the same kind of work we are trying to achieve – please contact us and let us know what you are doing!

Here is Zavora, the biggest problem we're facing along the shore is the increase in netting. Two-three years ago a couple of nets could be found around the Rock Pool/Launch area. Now we are counting up to 15 nets dotted in and around the area, most of them blocking what is one major travelling route for many of the pelagic species. This obviously has got to mean trouble. Every week, we are witnessing Devil Rays being dragged out from the nets, along with Hammerhead sharks and Nurse Sharks, and, sadly, some Manta Rays as well.

The first recent incident happened in August. Our interns noticed a local fishing boat pulling a large female Manta out of the sea, and brutally chopping her up on the beach while she was still alive. They brought back photos of her belly, and we were sad when we were able to identify her as one of the mantas who has been resident to the area for almost 10 years. She was first identified in Tofo in 2007, and then re-spotted in 2005 and 2007 before her life was brutally ended after having been caught in a net in Zavora.

Then, a couple of weeks back, the dive centre received a phone call from one of the local fishermen. They had gone out to pull in their nets, and had found several Mantas and Devil Rays entangled, and now they wanted our help to release them, as they were unable to pull them all in. Juan and Sabrina went out to help, but as the fishermen didn't allow them to cut the nets, and the operation was getting too dangerous as they themselves were getting entangled, they had to abort after having saved one Devil Ray. The nets were eventually pulled in with the help of more than 20 people, with 4 female Manta Rays, 7 Devil Rays and a few Tuna entangled in three nets. Yara went to try and negotiate with the fishermen as well as educate about low production rates etc, and they agreed to free one or two of the Mantas for a fee of 200 Meticals. Unfortunately the rays had been tangled in the nets for too long, having spent all their energy trying to free themselves, so by the time we managed to detangle them on the beach it was already too late. All four Mantas died that day. So did all the Devil Rays, except one newborn who we found on its mothers belly and set free.

Pictures were taken of the Mantas bellies and compared to our database, and we were sad to find that one of the Mantas was identified in August.

Although supposedly not far away (which is what they said a year back), the protection of Manta Rays are still not in place in Mozambique, and incidents like these proves that the mantas need our help more than ever!

Summer means Turtle nesting season, but unfortunately plenty threats are awaiting these amazing animals as they come closer to the shores. The day after the Manta incident, we went to the Rock Pool to search for Nudis and to remove inactive nets. First of all we could hardly get in due to all the nets blocking the pool, and when we finally got there we found no less than five nets criss-crossing. With a little Hawksbill Turtle caught in one of them. We managed to wriggle it loose, and the turtle immediately took off, and swam straight in to the next net. Another rescue operation later, it was again free and whilst we wanted to carry it across to the open sea, it again managed to swim off. Straight into a third net. This time we weren't going to let it go, and after freeing it we took it to the edge. It took us a long time to find a net-free spot to release it, but eventually we did and the turtle swam off to see another day. Sadly, our 'high' from saving the turtle was soon crushed when we got to the beach to see a Small Eyed Stingray and some Devil Rays dead on the beach.

Dunes de Dovela reported the first Turtle Nest of the season in the middle of November, but as it goes, the nest was found poached the next day. But at Dunes de Dovela they are people of action, and so they called for meetings with the community to set up turtle watch with incentives for reporting and conserving nests. They also contacted local authorities who are positive to work together with ACCM in conservation matters.



After the latest events people from the Maritime department in Inhambane came to see what they could do about the situation in Zavora. They found one person carrying a poached turtle, and he was promptly taken to the police and arrested. They also found that whilst the fishermen had licences to fish, most did not have a licence to fish with nets, and many nets were confiscated and fines given.

Chris and Carlos, two of the people behind the Mozambiquean shark fishing documentary Shiver, also came to film in the area for their new documentary about Mantas and Whale Sharks. They had a talk to some of the fishermen, who as it turns out must have paid attention to Yaras little talk as they were now sharing their concerns about the increase in Mantas being caught due to their low reproduction rate! Education clearly does work!

Talks with both authorities and fishing community will continue, as we cannot afford these things to happen on a regular basis. We obviously understand that people must eat, but it is in the best interest of everyone to practice more sustainable methods to preserve the oceans resources for future generations. This we are hoping to achieve through education and communication. We will start with what we see on a daily basis, so we can stand strong together for the big battle against the commercial fishing terrorists!

As not to leave you sad and frustrated after reading about the latest occurrences, we'd like to end our newsletter with an update on our eco-building project along with some nice pics showing how lovely Zavora really is!



### Eco Centre in progress

The building of our research and education centre is well on its way! The first thing we did, both for practical reasons but also as a test project to learn how to do things, was to build a shed entirely out of bottles! The finished result is a 2x3meter shed made up by 3000 'brick' bottles and small amounts of cement to hold the structure. The door was created using bamboo and plastic bottles, and the windows were taken from an old Land Rover.

The toilet block is now almost done, only parts of the floors and the grass roof are left to complete. The toilets were built using earth bricks, whilst the walls around the showers were constructed with bottles and cans, stacked in patterns to form fun and colourful designs. Although we were rather determined to have the bottle building be a girls only work project, we had to eventually give in when some very kind, very capable boys came all the way from Europe to volunteer their help! Still, us ladies are still the ones in charge, and we have made sure our volunteers apply the same feminine techniques we would have used, i.e. made with love, not (necessarily) with a level!



The centre itself is also coming up nicely. The walls around the first floor are in place, and the four local builders employed are now preparing to start constructing the second floor. We have also employed 2 workers to make our earth bricks, and they are now pressing more than 200 bricks per day. The plan is to have the centre and toilets finished by February, so there is still a fair bit to go!

For those of you in Mozambique – we are still in need of bottles and tins! Please keep collecting, and let us know when you have a reasonable amount so we can arrange pick-up! We are also extremely grateful for any help we can get, so if you would like to come to Zavora to lend us a hand with construction, bottle-cutting, brick making – anything – let us know! Whether it's for a day or for a month, we'll be forever grateful!

### Project Aware

This year, Project aware, an international organisation dedicated to the conservation of our oceans and coastal areas, announced a competition as part of their Fight against Marine Debris project. We were proud to learn that ACCM's 'Rubbish Thermometer' was shortlisted as one of the candidates for a grant to complete their project. Our idea was to build a 'thermometer' to measure the amount of non-recyclable or reusable trash collected during beach clean ups, allowing us to more carefully monitor the problems we face here in Zavora as well as being able to use the thermometer for educational purposes. Unfortunately, luck wasn't on our side this time, but we still feel honoured that our ideas are being noticed and that our hard work is being recognised. Next time it will be us! We are still hoping to be able to find some funds to make the project happen, donations are as always welcome!



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