

## **THE MANTA TRUST HITS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE AS THE 5000<sup>TH</sup> REEF MANTA RAY IS IDENTIFIED IN THE MALDIVES**

**The Manta Trust's pioneering Maldivian Manta Ray Project is celebrating the exciting discovery of the 5000<sup>th</sup> reef manta ray in the Maldives by offering one lucky supporter the chance to name it.**

Just imagine five thousand manta rays! Reef manta rays are gentle ocean giants, with the largest individuals reaching up to four meters in wingspan. They are long lived, late to mature and have only a single pup at a time, so maintaining a large population size is a continual ecological struggle for this species. The Maldives is home to the largest population of reef mantas in the world by a large margin, making it a very important location for manta research.

The Maldivian Manta Ray Project (MMRP) has been studying this special population for over 15 years, creating a database of thousands of manta ray ID shots, many of which were submitted by the general public through their citizen science programme [IDtheManta](#). Manta rays can be easily identified as each ray has a unique spot pattern on their belly that remains unchanged throughout their life. This spot pattern can be matched against reference images, just as humans can be identified using fingerprints. The MMRP's database is the largest manta database in the world and has helped to build a picture of the reef manta ray population's size, demographics, and movements in the Maldives.

*"Our whole team are delighted to have identified the 5000th reef manta ray in the Maldives." explained Tam Sawers, MMRP Manager, "It's a testimony to the hard work and dedication of all our researchers, interns, citizen scientists and collaborating tourist operators in the Maldives. Now we'd like the public to help us name this special manta ray."*

The Manta Trust is offering one lucky supporter the chance to choose a name for this juvenile male reef manta ray. The winner of this competition will be picked at random and after naming the 5000<sup>th</sup> manta ray, they will be sent a personalised manta adoption certificate, a cuddly manta toy and a fascinating book all about manta and devil rays of the world.

Identifying 5,000 individual manta rays is no mean feat. This symbolic achievement offers a perfect opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the MMRP to date. Most notably, gaining national protection for manta rays in the Maldives through driving the designation of two manta-focused Marine Protected Areas in 2009, and spearheading the addition of all ray species (including manta and devil rays) to the Maldivian National Protected Species List in 2014. The MMRP also helped to develop the first scientifically advised best practice code of conduct for manta ray tourism, its Marine Education Programme has reached hundreds of local students to inspire the next generation of Maldivian ocean ambassadors, and the MMRP continues to provide science-backed recommendations for policy changes in other countries where manta and devil rays are more vulnerable.

Manta and devil rays around the world are under serious threat from overfishing. Driven by the lucrative trade in gill plates for use in Asian Medicine, populations in many regions have been in decline due to targeted fisheries and accidental bycatch and both species of manta ray are now listed as “Vulnerable” by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. You can help to support the Manta Trust’s global research and conservation work by giving someone a digital manta adoption pack for Christmas. Rudolph the Red Nosed Ray is only available to adopt until the end of December, whilst George the Giant, Mrs Flappy and several other charismatic rays are available to adopt all year round.

**The Manta Trust is offering one lucky supporter the chance to choose a name for this very special 5000<sup>th</sup> manta ray. To take part, simply visit [www.mantatrust.org/5000th-manta](http://www.mantatrust.org/5000th-manta) and enter before December 25th.**

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- The Manta Trust is a UK-registered manta ray conservation charity, co-ordinating global research and conservation efforts around manta rays: [www.mantatrust.org](http://www.mantatrust.org)
- The Maldivian Manta Ray Project (MMRP) is the charity's flagship research project. After more than a decade of research across this island nation, the MMRP has evolved into one of the largest and longest-standing manta conservation groups in the world: [www.mantatrust.org/maldives](http://www.mantatrust.org/maldives)
- Adopt a Manta: [www.mantatrust.org/adopt-a-manta](http://www.mantatrust.org/adopt-a-manta)
- For Press Enquiries please contact: Simon Hilbourne, Manta Trust ([simon@mantatrust.org](mailto:simon@mantatrust.org))