

Protected Marine Species in the Maldives

While some of these species listed below are protected by international law, the Maldives has also passed its own laws to try and further protect these vulnerable marine species.

The fishing, killing and collection of the following animals is prohibited in the Maldives:

- Black Corals
- Triton Shells
- Giant Clams
- Berried and small Lobsters
- Napoleon Wrasses
- Sea Turtles
- Whale Sharks
- Dolphins and Whales
- Sharks (8 tourist Atolls only)

Some examples of species that are protected from trade in any form are the following:

- Black Corals
- Stony Corals
- Triton and Trochus Shells
- Pearl Oysters
- Lobsters
- Moray Eels
- Puffer Fish
- Parrot Fish
- Skates and Rays
- Sea Turtles
- Dolphins and Whales

Enforcing this protection status has proven difficult, and many endangered species are still being exploited. This leaflet aims to highlight ways in which you can help preserve the biodiversity of the Maldives' and the world's reefs.



The Baa Atoll Project

All six resorts in the Baa Atoll have come together to form a working group to target environmental issues. The group meets regularly and aims to help protect and conserve the Maldivian flora and fauna.

The focus is particularly on sharks as keystone species on local coral reefs. A total ban on shark fishing and trade in the Maldives is targeted. Other issues being identified and worked on are manta ray protection, night fishing practices, minimum size of food fish, anchor damage, waste disposal and educational programmes.

This proactive group recognises how important a healthy marine environment is for the sustainable future of local communities and the tourism industry in the Maldives.

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Preservation of the Maldivian Marine Environment



Threats to the Maldivian Marine Environment

Since the early 1970s, tourism has rapidly developed in the Maldives and has become just as vital as the traditional tuna fisheries. While the country moves forward, achieving economic growth, it is also confronted by unique environmental challenges.

The marine environment of the Maldives, with its stunning beaches and beautiful reefs, is one of its primary assets. Not only are coral reefs a source of employment, food, leisure and provider of different habitats for thousands of species, the reefs also protect the islands from storms and erosion.



The Maldives would not exist without the coral reefs that create and encircle the islands.



However, the marine environment faces increasing pressure from a number of areas:

- Global warming and coral bleaching
- Pollution and discarded waste
- Over-fishing and unsound fishing practices
- Tourism and the souvenir trade

While most of these issues are global and need to be targeted on an international and national level, small local actions can also lead to positive change, for example by preserving the Maldivian marine biodiversity.

Where have all the Sharks Gone?

Globally, **over 100 million sharks are killed annually**, primarily just to satisfy the demand for shark fin soup. This unsustainable, wasteful, and cruel industry, fuelled purely by the **demand for a luxury item**, is rapidly deleting these top predators from our oceans. The consequences of this for the whole



marine environment will be disastrous. If we continue to kill these animals at this current rate, they will be extinct within just a few short decades.

Problems Close to Our Shores

Shark fishing in the Maldives is a problem! The killing of sharks is prohibited in the eight tourist atolls, but illegal fishing is still widely practiced. However, diving with sharks is a major attraction in the Maldives, drawing USD 2.3 million every year over double the export value of shark meat. **A live shark is worth far more than a dead one!**



What can be done to help sharks?

- Do not eat shark-fin soup or shark meat.
- Do not buy shark products such as jaws or jewellery made out of non-fossilized shark teeth.
- Spread the word about the importance of sharks for the world's oceans.

Reef Fish

Besides sharks, numerous reef fish species are threatened by over-fishing and habitat destruction. Groupers, snappers and trevallies are popular food fishes and are caught by locals and guests alike. By removing these predatory animals from coral reefs, not only do the species themselves become endangered but also shifts in species composition may take place, affecting the entire ecosystem.

What can be done to help reef fishes?

- Do not kill undersized, immature fish.
- Release all non-target species and be aware of protected and endangered species.
- Practice tag-and-release for game fishing.



Corals and Molluscs

Coral reefs are increasingly endangered by many threats and are **vanishing worldwide at a current annual rate of 2%**. Tourism also plays a part in this decline, exposing corals and other invertebrates to damage and exploitation.

What can be done to help corals and shells?

- Never stand on or touch any living corals or other marine life.
- Do not collect any coral pieces or shells from the beach or reef.
- Do not purchase any shell or coral jewellery.