



REEFWATCH MARINE CONSERVATION

Annual Report 2021 - 2022

ReefWatch Marine
Conservation

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Introduction



Dear friends, donors and ocean lovers,

The months from April 2021 to March 2022 were a period of great growth and change for us at ReefWatch. After a difficult few years with the pandemic and its numerous waves, we finally had an uninterrupted season of work.

In the Andaman Islands, our Re(ef)Generate project found new supporters, including a potential opportunity to restore coral reefs in Mayabundar (North Andamans). In Karnataka and Goa we were able to expand our field bases and improve infrastructure to be in a better position to treat the stranded animals brought to us. We also signed MoUs with various institutions and organisations to improve our network and create impactful collaborations.

As always I would like to thank our generous CSR partners - GMM Pfaudler who have supported us through thick and thin, the Jnana Foundation, Edicon Pneumatic Tool Co. and Tally Solutions . I am humbled by the support of our individual donors who are generous as they are conscious and caring of our precious oceans even in these economically challenging times.

I hope you enjoy reading this report that outlines our progress over the past financial year and that we can count on your continued support through the next.

Wishing you all good health, resilience and strength,

Nayantara Jain

Nayantara Jain | Executive Director | ReefWatch Marine Conservation

ACTIVITY TIMELINE

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF FY 2021-22

MAY '21

Goa: 3 Neurospikes, 5 treatments & releases
Karnataka: Reporting Network Outreach

JUL '21

Andaman: Weekly workshops for children
Goa: 1 turtle treated, Ocean Watch panel discussion
Karnataka: 2 turtles rescued, 4 treated, 1 released

SEP '21

Goa: 7 cases attended, sea bird released
Karnataka: Dolphin PM & released of 5 turtles

NOV '21

Andaman: Mineral Accretion installed & 5 volunteers local school workshops
Goa: 5 cases attended, sea bird released

JAN '22

Andaman: Mayabunder recos
Goa: 11 cases attended
Karnataka: 3 pregnant turtle PMs

MAR '22

Andaman: New team hired
Goa: 6 cases attended, Forest Department's Pictal up on Wildlife Day
Karnataka: 482 turtle hatchlings released

APR '21

Andaman: Acrobition device Removed
Goa: Formal Agreement signed with FD
Karnataka: Turtle Festival Workshop

JUN '21

Andaman: Re(ef)Quadrant resumed, Online outreach commences
Goa: 77 standing cases attended, Fundraising filmshot
Karnataka: 6 sea turtles treated, 1 dolphin PM

AUG '21

Andaman: Workshops Continue
Goa: 6 animals treated, new Earth Summit
Karnataka: 6 turtles, 1 bird released

OCT '21

Andaman: Re(ef)Quadrant dives begin
Goa: 9 cases attended, Rotary talk
Karnataka: 1 Forpase PM, 1 Ocean turtle treatment

DEC '21

Andaman: Coral Monitoring, 2 volunteers
Goa: 3 cases attended, 1 live dolphin
Karnataka: Sea turtle nesting sites

FEB '22

Andaman: 2nd round of planting
Goa: 12 cases, fundraising Mr. Intermed
Karnataka: Turtle nest monitoring



Andaman Islands

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands is an archipelago comprising of 572 islands and islets located in the Bay of Bengal. They are one of the four key coral reef areas in India and support over 1200 fish and 400 coral species, amongst other marine life. Coral reef ecosystems all over the world are under great pressure today from threats such as global warming, ocean acidification, overfishing and physical damage from extreme weather conditions and irresponsible development. In the Indian context, this phenomenon is most visible in the Andamans which is fast developing as an international tourist destination.

The pressure of development, irresponsible tourism and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events due to climate change have been the major cause for deterioration of coral reefs in the Andamans. ReefWatch began operations on the islands with a mission to help alleviate this pressure on one of the most diverse coral reef ecosystems in the country. In the third year of our pilot project Re(ef)Generate, we have seen great success in the coral restoration techniques that we have tried and tested. We believe we have come a long way in understanding and tweaking restoration methods that can be successful in the Indian context and help conserve these rich ecosystems and the life they support.

This year, due to the pandemic, we suspended some of the outreach and community programs that have been an integral part of our Andamans field base activities. We hope to restart them once we emerge from these difficult times.





Re(ef)Generate

This pilot project was initiated to aid the restoration and rehabilitation of coral in the Andaman Islands, by actively creating conducive conditions for them to thrive.

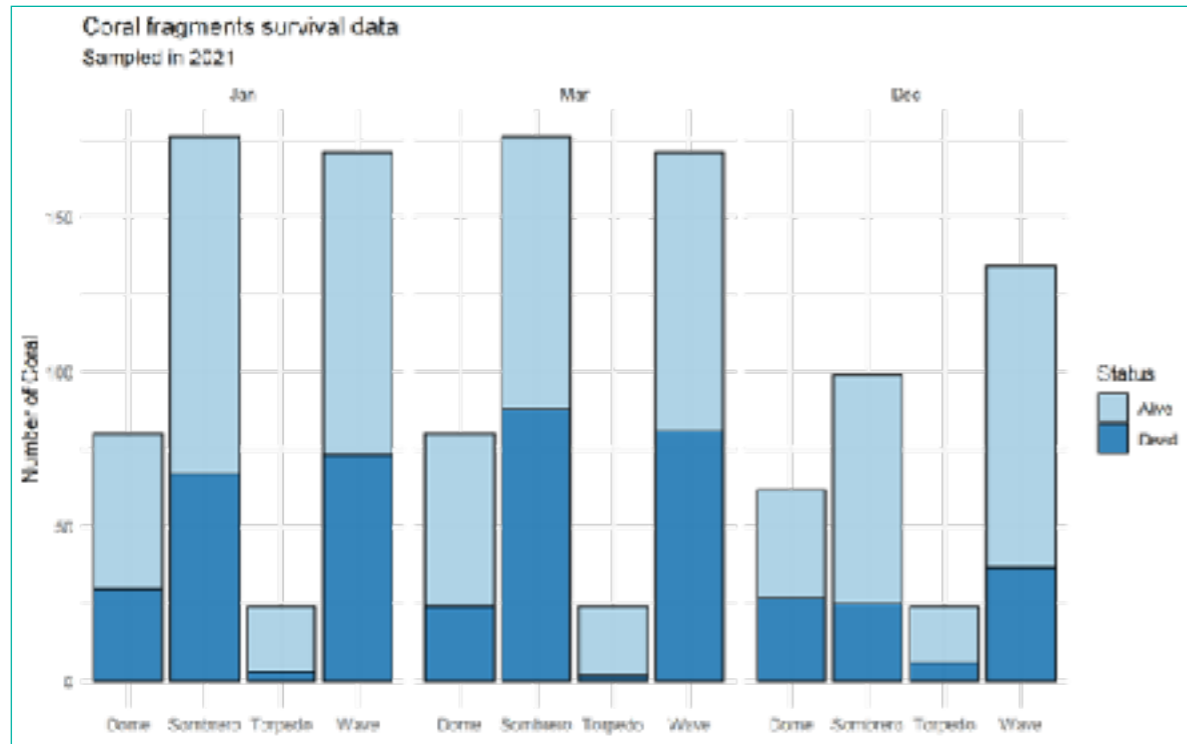
Reef restoration uses physical and biological restoration methods which involves attaching naturally broken coral fragments onto metal structures underwater that are connected to a mineral accretion device to help them grow faster into an extension of the natural reef.

November 2021 to April 2022 was the first season we had full and uninterrupted electrical supply from our panels to the structures as we were finally able to do the wiring in a way that could withstand significant tidal action. Thanks to this we saw significant growth of corals and a corresponding increase in marine life around the structures.

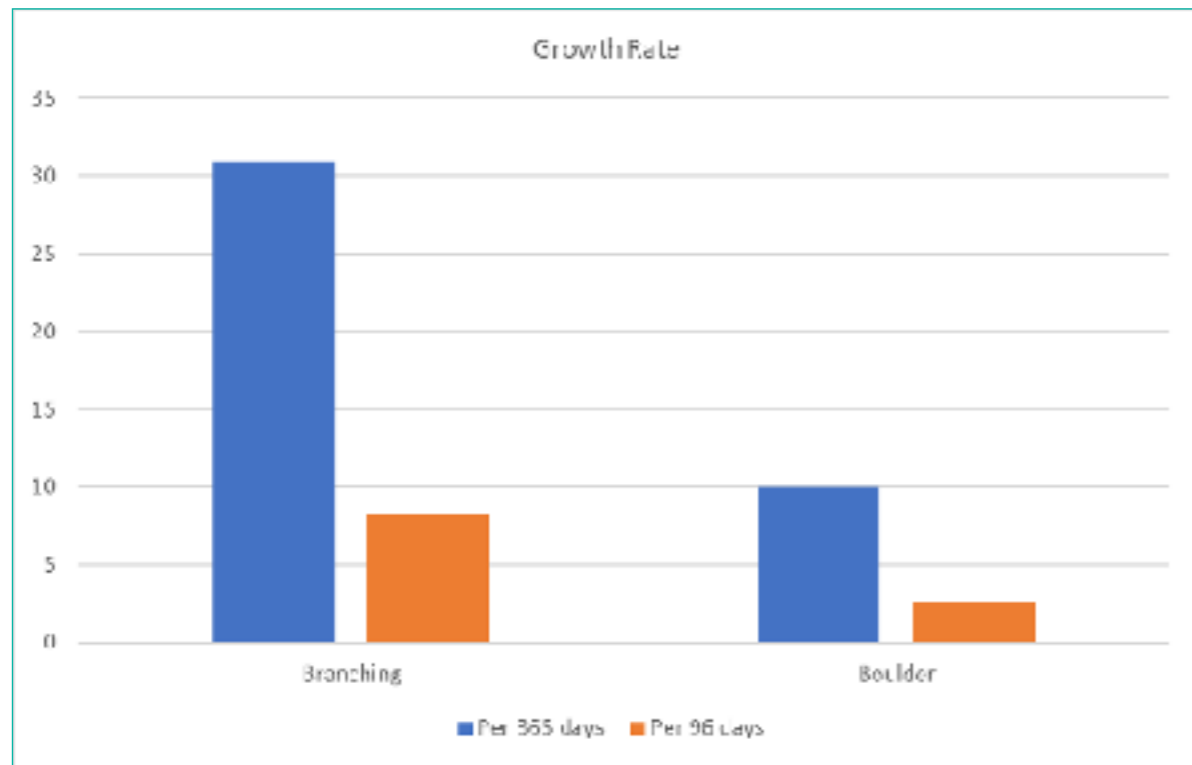
By helping the corals in being more resilient and faster growing we also noted a marked decrease in the amount of times we had to do macro-algal removal dives.



Re(ef)Build Progress



Coral Fragment Survival Data



We installed our mineral accretion device on the reef last field season in January, 2021 but had to disconnect it and bring it back to the base prematurely, on the brink of another Covid induced lockdown by the end of April, 2021. The south-west monsoon hits the Andamans very hard each year, making it impossible for our team to dive and not safe for the device to be left on the reef. From May 2021 to November 2021, the team could not access the artificial reef site due to COVID induced lockdowns, the onset of the monsoon and then delayed permissions from the fisheries to start diving on the islands again. Despite the pandemic, on World Oceans Day we renewed the Reef Guardian program for the coming year and opened sections of our structures to be adopted by individuals passionate about conserving marine ecosystems.

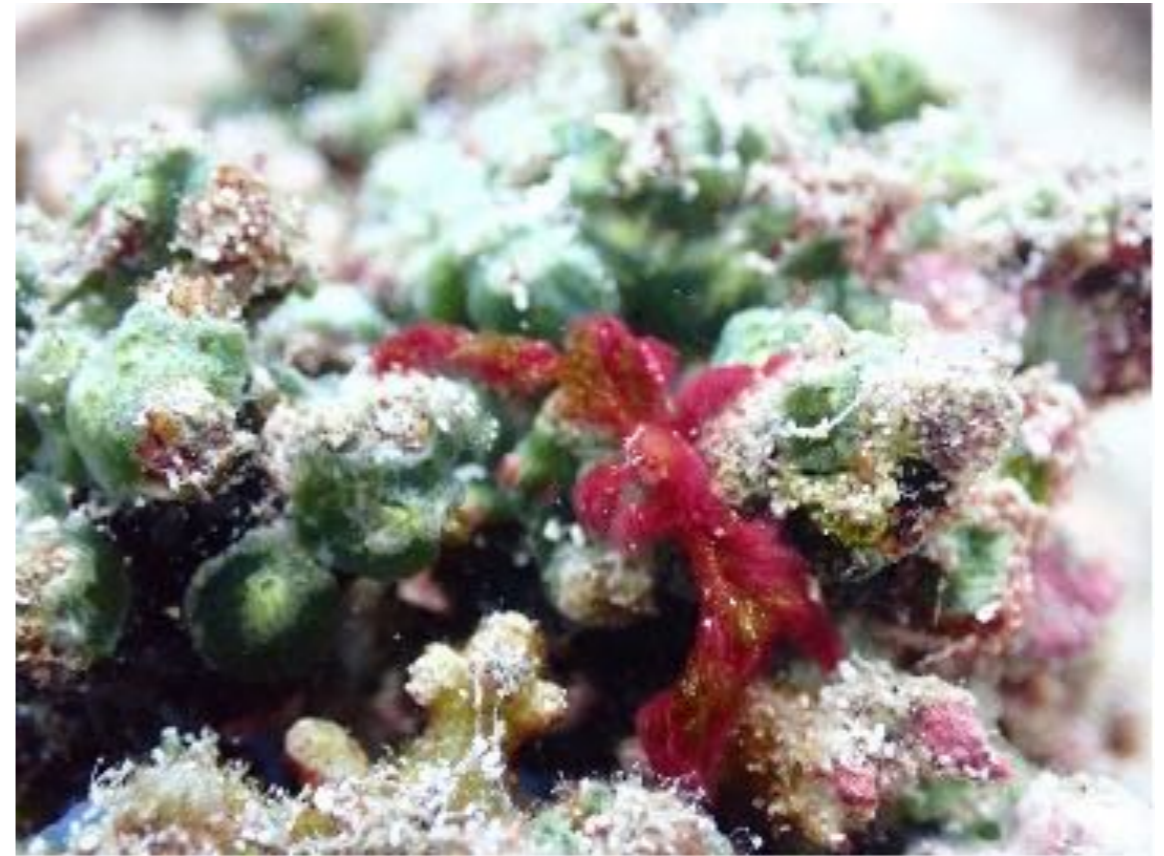
Our team returned to the base in September for the current field season and re-installed the mineral accretion device in early November as the weather calmed. On the first dive of the season, we saw that some of the coral had died or fallen off due bad weather and algal overgrowth but on the bright side we were seeing a lot more fish and invertebrate life interacting with the structures. We then proceeded to removing dead fragments and repopulating the structures. On the left are graphs of fragment survivals and coral growth. Our fish and invertebrate surveys also showed more life using the structures as habitat, thus increasing the reef's ecosystem function.

From April 2021 to March 2022 we conducted 3 rounds of monitoring on the reef and found below are graphs with analysed data of the growth and survival of coral on the reef. We are currently noticing an average growth of approximately 9cm for branching coral and about 2.5 cm for boulder coral every three months.

This leads us to believe that the coral is growing at a projected rate of about 30 cm for branching coral and around 10 cm for boulder coral per year. The coral survival rate is currently at 62.7 percent which has been steadily rising and is expected to be higher going forward with the mineral accretion device functioning more reliably.

We have been noticing a marked increase in fish species at our structures. This is a direct effect of the growing dominance of coral aided by the presence of the mineral accretion device. This season, we spotted the rare orangutan crab on the structures. These little masters of disguise belong to the decorator crab family and are only 2 cm in size. What makes them very interesting, is their odd resemblance to an orangutan. They have relatively long arms and decorate their bodies with a reddish algae that really resembles the hair on an orangutan's body. Another regular visitor on the reef has been a school of Bluefin Trevally. These fast swimming predators are found hunting schools of smaller fish over coral reefs. Their iridescent blue colouration makes them beautiful but deadly ambush hunters. The presence of mid-level reef predators like the trevally are a great sign of the artificial reefs growing ecosystem function.

This project was established as a pilot - to demonstrate via example that this form of reef conservation was viable in India. Hence we always count it as a success when more such projects are implemented in the country via various organisations in collaboration with us. Last year the Andaman & Nicobar Forest Department trained with us and set up in similar project in the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park. In January 2022, we were approached by a private eco-resort to explore the possibility of establishing a coral restoration project in the North Andamans. Our team travelled to Mayabunder and did several recce dives to establish an artificial reef and the proposal and further discussions are underway as we speak.





The quarterly newsletter update to Re(ef)Guardians on their adopted structure

Re(ef)Guardian

The Reef Guardian program was introduced to explore potential options for financial sustainability to divert GMM Pfaudler's CSR contributions to expansion of the Re(ef)Generate project to other part of the islands and the country. The Reef Guardian initiative was a huge success. Within six weeks, 21 out of 23 sections had been adopted by our new Reef Guardians who received a care package from ReefWatch and continue to receive a quarterly newsletter updating them about their sections of the reef and the coral and creatures that live there. All the Reef Guardians were Indians who were passionate about the oceans, marine life and Scuba diving.

Our Re(ef)Guardians were a diverse range of people - from young children to Indians living abroad, to groups of friends who had been - or wanted one day - to travel and dive together. Here are their names, with our gratitude:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Shreya Rao | 12. The Blue Voice |
| 2. Ravi Sunderrajan | 13. The Little Flowers |
| 3. Deepak Verma | 14. Puneet Goenka |
| 4. Siddharth Thomas | 15. Ashika Mehta |
| 5. Anjali Mehta | 16. Padmini VA |
| 6. Shijo Thomas | 17. Maria Goretti |
| 7. Sarah Edwards | 18. Coco Palm Swim Wear |
| 8. Pragyan Goyal | 19. Studio Verandah |
| 9. Shishir Joshi | 20. Aparna Nadig & Sameer Gaffar |
| 10. Aarushi Khanna | 21. Tushar Gogia |
| 11. Gopikaa Davar | |



The Re(ef)Guardian Certificate sent as part of the welcome care package



Re(ef)Generate Course

In February 2021, we designed a new three-day course based on the restoration techniques employed by us on our artificial reef at Chidyatapu. The 'Re(ef)Generate Course: An Introduction to Coral Restoration' has been designed for advanced divers who are passionate about ocean ecosystems and who want to delve deeper into the problems faced by coral reefs by taking active part in their conservation. Along with hands-on experience in coral restoration techniques, this course takes one deeper into the reef ecosystem by providing them tools to observe and identify not just marine life but their vastly intricate relationships with each other. A diver learns reef rehabilitation and through it learns what is essential for a healthy reef environment. This program includes theory presentations, videos, a final exam as well as an in-water practical component. The course has been very well received, and we had 12 students this year.





Volunteer Program

Our volunteer program has seen healthy numbers this season. In just the last two months, we have had 8 long-term volunteers from various parts of the country bringing their skills and experience in marine biology, life sciences, graphic design, diving and marketing to assist the Re(ef)Generate project. One of our volunteers Pranav was a marine biologist who helped in analyzing our past monitoring data, while another, Shagun helped design material and the course card for our new 'Re(ef)Generate Course: An introduction to reef restoration'. Another volunteer, Pia Kishen, created an extremely useful intertidal species guide in her time here. Another volunteer Uday Sangamesh had such a successful stint that he applied and was appointed Project Coordinator for the coming season.

Karnataka Coast

The state of Karnataka has a coastline of about 320 kilometres and is made up of 3 districts – Uttara Kannada, Udupi and Dakshina Kannada – which include 22 urban agglomerations and 1044 villages. This coast is home to several resident and transient marine megafauna which include several species of dolphins, whales and sea turtles.

The Karnataka Coastal Conservation project was established in 2019 after identifying several issues detrimental to the health of our coasts and has been working on various aspects of conserving coastal ecosystems across Karnataka.

Our Base in Karnataka is a small cottage set in the midst of lush greenery found at the foothills of the Western Ghats. It is almost right on the beach located in the outskirts of Kundapur. Kundapur is located in the Udupi District and being almost at the centre of the Karnataka coastline, it provides easy access to beaches across the state so our team can attend to strandings, while conducting other projects, with relative ease.

Marine Megafauna Stranding Response

The Karnataka Marine Megafauna Strandings project was established in 2019 and has been running for the past 3 years. Strandings are events where marine animals are found either dead or alive on beaches and shores. They are often injured and require assistance; both medical and physical, to be moved back to the water. The major causes have been found to be fisheries related (net entanglement), exposure to pollutants, unusual natural events, diseases and parasitic infections. Marine Megafauna Strandings have gone undocumented and unrecorded in the past and our team initiated the project by first addressing the issue of a lack of database of strandings by establishing a robust reporting network.

Since the beginning of the project, we have attended to a total of 124 individual cases, out of which 17 cases which included Olive Ridley sea turtles, Green sea turtles and

pelagic birds such as Seagulls and Masked Boobies were rescued and rehabilitated at our Marine Megafauna Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, Kundapur, Karnataka.

We have also participated in Sea turtle nest monitoring and hatchery monitoring. We were involved in monitoring 18 Olive ridley sea turtle nests. A total of 674 Olive ridley sea turtle hatched and were safely guided to the sea.

Our team created a video containing the step by step procedure to monitor sea turtle nest and help guide the sea turtle hatchlings to the sea safely. The video was circulated among all the fisher communities along the coast of Karnataka, the local forest department officers and Forest department staff. The video acted as a mass media workshop.



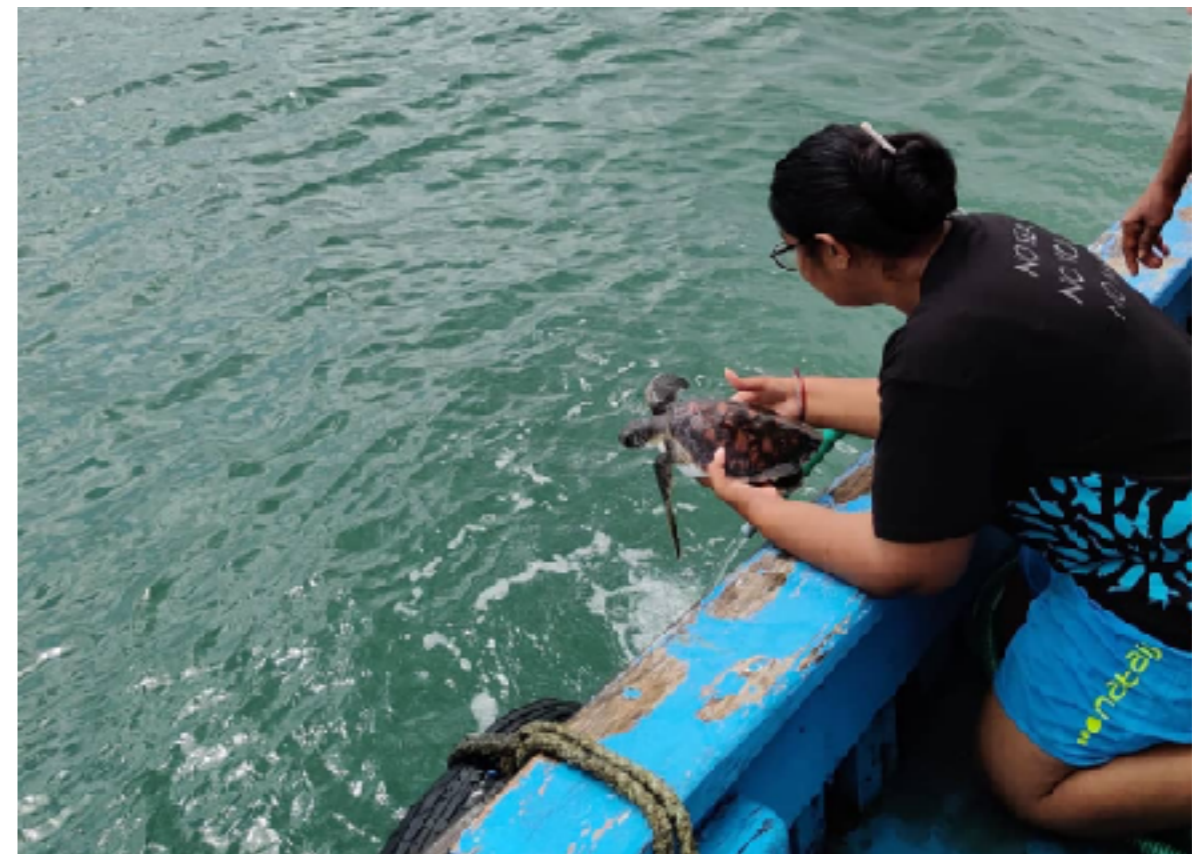
Total number Strandings			
Marine Megafauna		Species	Number of cases
Cetaceans	Dolphin	Humpback Dolphin	24
		Spinner Dolphin	1
	Porpoise	Finless Porpoise	2
		Whale	Brydes Whale
Sea Turtle	False Killer Whale		1
		Olive ridley sea turtle	66
		Green Sea Turtle	18
Pelagic Birds		Masked Boobie	3
		Sea Gull	1
Fish		Morev eel	1
		Whale shark	1
Unidentifiable		Dolphin	3
		Whale	1
		Sea Turtle	2
Total			125

Our team was awarded a memento by the Mysore Maharaja Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, for our outstanding work in Marine Conservation.

We have expanded our team by including an outreach officer. His duties are to conduct outreach activities for various stakeholders, help strengthen the marine stranding responders' network and help with rescue and rehabilitation of stranded marine megafauna.

As the Karnataka Marine Megafauna Stranding project is expanding we have also expanded our base in Kundpaur.

Presently we are collaborating with the Karnataka Forest Department to establish a Marine Megafauna Rescue and Rehabilitation center in Mangalore and 3 satellite centers in Karwar, Honnavar and Kundapur.



Goa Coast



Since 2017, the network “Ocean Watch” has been working to record and report incidents of stranded marine animals, particularly marine megafauna such as Dolphins and turtles, all along the coast of Goa. With a 7500 km coastline, marine strandings across the country are vastly under-reported due to the lack of a consolidated network, infrastructure, training and awareness. The state of Goa is a tourist hub, known especially for its beaches. With over 600 lifeguards deployed over 37 stations across the 100 km of coastline, Goa presents a unique situation where there are always eyes and ears on the ground. This resource was utilized to create a robust reporting network back in 2017: “Ocean Watch”, created by Terra Conscious in collaboration with the Goa Forest Department and (of course) Drishti Lifesaving Services.

ReefWatch began its engagement in Goa upon invitation by the Goa Forest Department, working with Ocean Watch, to provide a much-needed veterinary component to the just over a year ago in March 2021. The first step was an introduction to Forest Department personnel during a workshop conducted by Terra Conscious at Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary.

Since then, we have been working to strengthen our presence on the ground through engagement with volunteers and veterinarians, and raising funds for veterinary treatments and infrastructure for injured marine life. We have also expanded our definition of marine megafauna (turtles, whales, dolphins, porpoises, etc) to include pelagic and coastal birds due a startling number of reported cases that we could not ignore.

Marine Megafauna Stranding Response



From March 22nd 2021 to April 2022, the total number of reported live and dead stranded marine animals was 238, with the ReefWatch team able to attend to 45% (106 cases) of these incidents. The majority of cases reported were of severely decomposed carcasses for which no necropsy or viable sample collection could be carried out. Of the live cases, we were able to attend well over 80% (59 of 71) of the cases to provide veterinary intervention. 37 animals were successfully treated and released.

In a mere year, we have grown from a full-time team of one and a half, collaborating with veterinary associate Dr. Charmaine Pinto, working out of a two-bedroom apartment (the only one we could find in the middle of the second COVID lockdown) to a three-bedroom bungalow with a team of 3, now including a full-time in-house veterinarian. We have faced and overcome significant challenges, particularly in terms of infrastructure, to deal with the sheer number of stranding incidents. The influx of cases during the monsoon season, in particular, was far beyond our expectations.

Despite calling in veterinary reinforcement in the form of Dr. Shantanu and Dr. Suranjana, we were overwhelmed with 4-5 calls a day, driving up and down the 100 km coastline.

We have built a good working relationship with forest department personnel on-ground and at the level of the Chief Wildlife Warden, providing real-time updates and by submitting post mortem and interim reports to share our progress. The forest department in Goa has taken a big step towards supporting marine conservation efforts by declaring two dedicated marine ranges in Goa (north and south respectively) to be able to provide better assistance and simplified procedures for processing paperwork.



Our protocols evolved as quickly as theGoing into our second year, we are more confident in our ability to handle the flood of cases. We are collaborating with animal rescuers from the NGO SAWE (Study and Awareness of Wildlife and Environment), to assist with live and dead strandings. Two workshops were conducted (in North and South Goa respectively) to train a handful of trusted rescuers in handling and transport of marine megafauna, stranding protocol, and safety practices to ensure protection of both the animal and Rescue Volunteer. Further, we provided kits to each attendee to better equip them to handle a marine stranding. We have also better equipped ourselves in terms of equipment and infrastructure. A car for tending to cases, and occasionally transport the concerned animal has been purchased along with a dedicated laptop, printer and hard drive for the base. Turtle treatment tanks and a deep freeze for storing fish have been ordered, as well as sample containers and medical inventory for necropsies and treatments.



Outreach

The support we have received thus far has been incredible. People, groups and institutions from all walks of life have reached out to learn, volunteer, donate or provide support in any way possible.

The momentum of our first monsoon or “stranding” season in Goa and subsequent findings prompted important conversations with people invested in protecting Goa’s heritage and biodiversity. Our first joint press release with the Goa Forest Department was published in June after the discovery of a fishing net in the stomach of an Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin. As the season progressed, we participated in panels organised by Thus Critique with our partners from the Ocean Watch Network to talk about the scale, challenges and support required to sustain effective stranding response, and the New Earth Summit to discuss “Protecting our Oceans, Coasts and Marine Life”.

In October 2021, the Jnana Foundation organised a meet with members of the Rotary Club of Panaji Midtown to introduce our team, the project and the challenges faced. It was an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals who have seen the drastic



Our Project Coordinator Manisha Rao speaking to a group of Wildlife Rescuers from SAWE Goa at Barefoot

changes of development in Goa and how that affects its biodiversity.

In December, the Jnana Foundation organised a beach clean-up in collaboration with Tangled Seas. It was the perfect opportunity to meet interested and invested individuals to talk about Ocean Watch as a whole, and the veterinary component in particular.

On the occasion of World Wildlife Day (March 3rd 2022), the Goa Forest Department organized a series of events to commemorate the day. The ReefWatch team was invited, along with Terra Conscious and Drishti Marine, to speak about the Ocean Watch network. We conducted a workshop for forest department personnel on first aid, feeding and cleaning protocol for injured marine life, particularly pelagic birds and sea turtles.

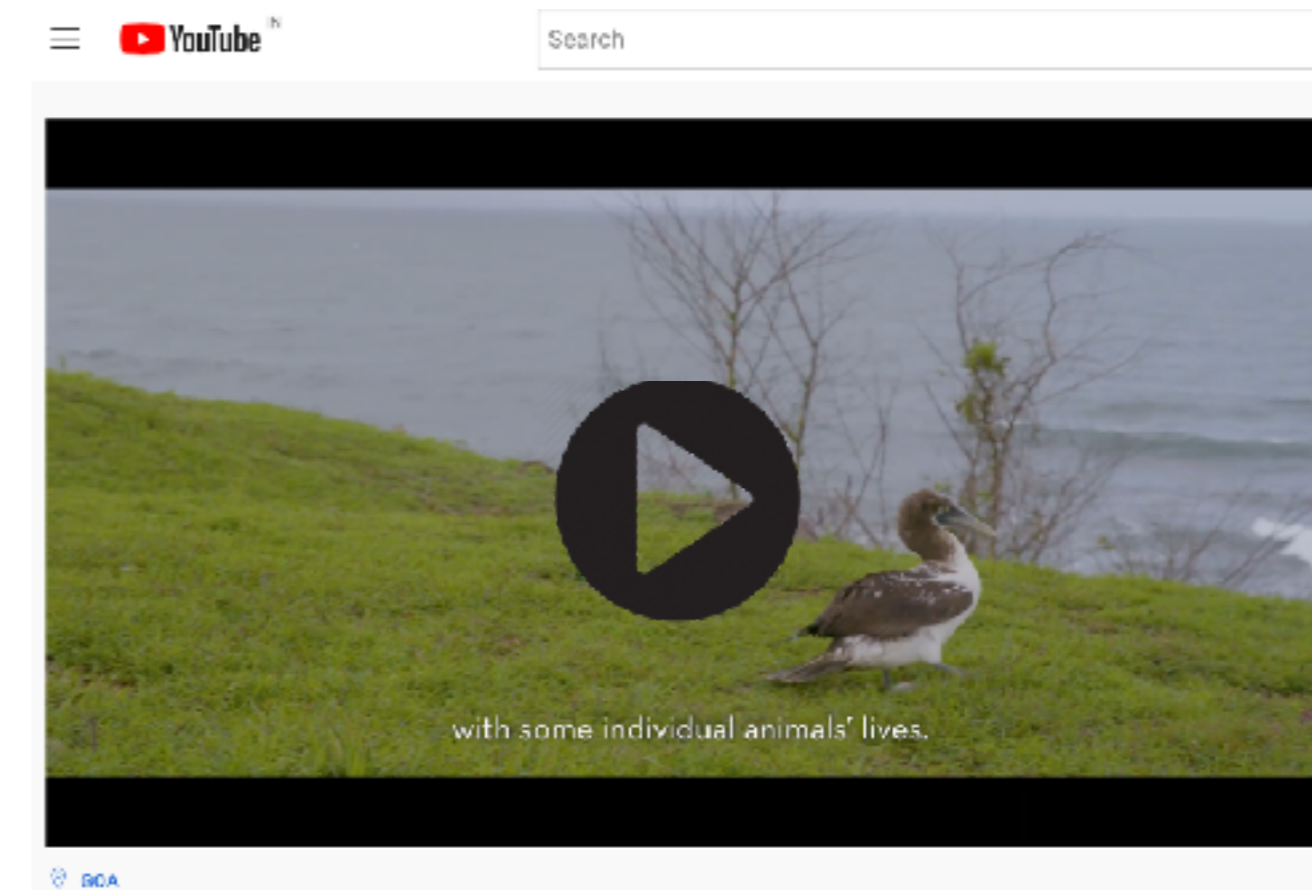
Coastal Guardians Film

In 2021, Emaho Films generously offered to produce a fundraising film for the purpose of their work relating to impact production. It was released in February 2022, and captures the working of the Ocean Watch Network. It followed the roles played by the Lifeguards, Forest Department, Terra Conscious and ReefWatch in bringing together a network that works to change the way each individual marine stranding is handled and accounted for. It includes interviews with Forest Department and Drishti personnel, and provides an insight into the emotion that drives such a vast collaborative network.

The film can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnJdWMTcq8g>.

The film was released on the occasion of World Whale Day in February 2022, followed by a panel discussion with the partners that make up Ocean Watch, a beach cleanup and film screening in March, and a celebration of Earth Day in April with a second live screening and discussion of impact production.

We are honoured and grateful for the time and effort put into this film and the far-reaching impacts it has already had in the public eye.



Next Steps: Gujarat

In early March 2022, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with C-SCAPES (Tata Trust) to begin recces along the coast of Gujarat to expand the Marine Megafauna project to that coast.

We expect to begin explorations there after the monsoons (once the stranding season in Karnataka and Goa is past us) and have scheduled an 8 month period to deliver a final project proposal which will be a collaborative effort by C-SCAPES and ReefWatch.

As with Goa and Karnataka, we are hoping to begin with the Rescue & Rehabilitation objective before expanding into Education, Awareness and Community projects.

In the Financial Year 2022-23 we are looking to focus on the following things, in addition to continue on going projects:

1. Renewed efforts in the Education, Awareness & Community Outreach space that was compromised due to Covid.
2. A focus on streamlining the organisational and management aspect to put necessary systems & protocols in place as we grow.

Our Donors



The Board



Mitali & Prahlad Kakar, Co-founders



Tarak Patel, Board Member



Sumer Verma, Board Member

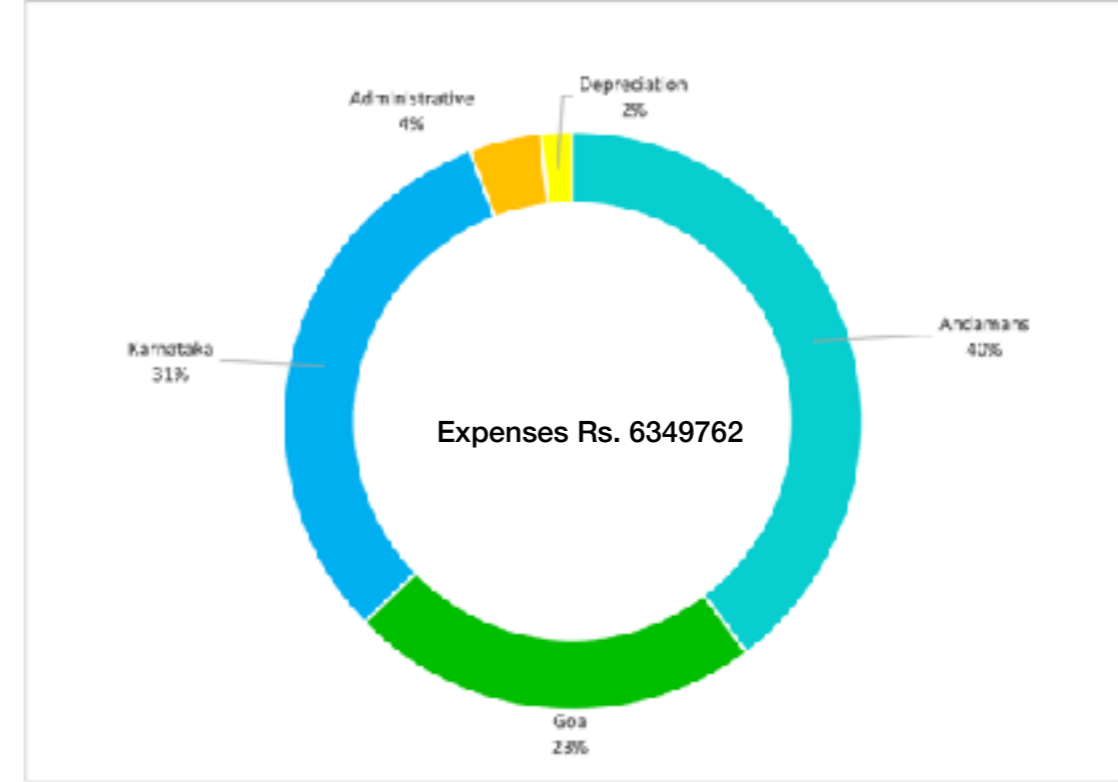
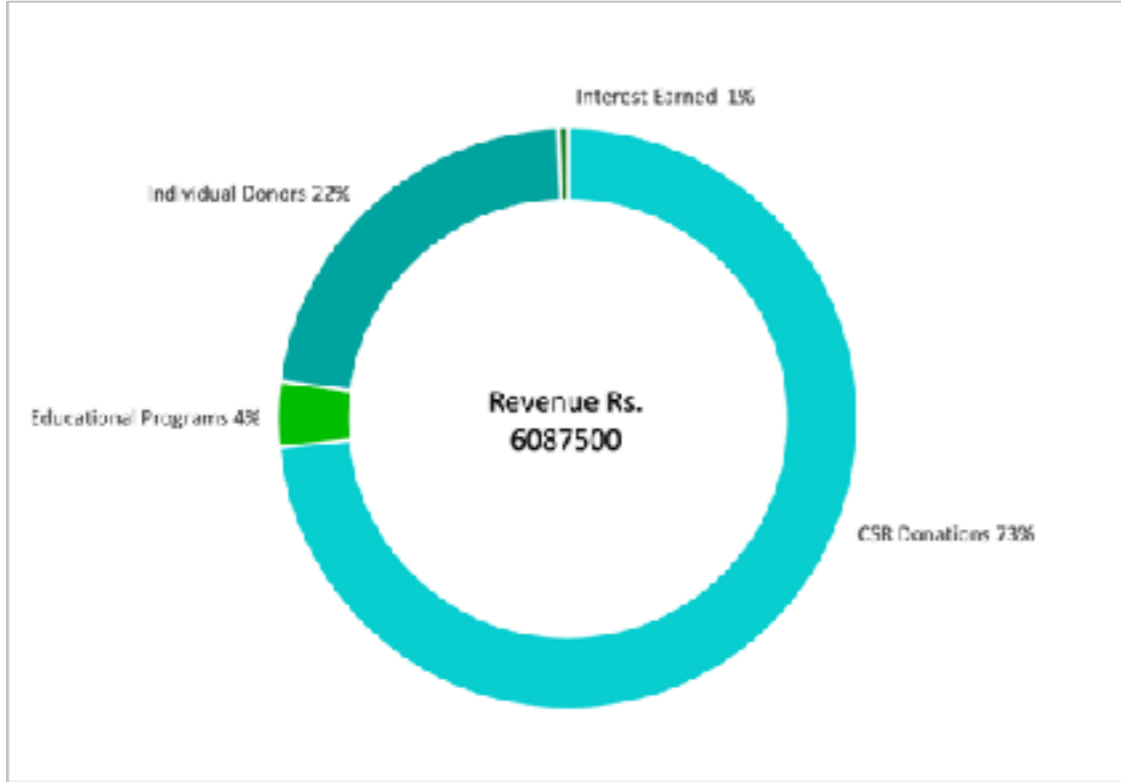
Nayantara Jain, Executive Director | Coral Reef Team: Karishma Goenka, Dhruv Sirohi, Anjili Matthew & Uday Sanghamesh



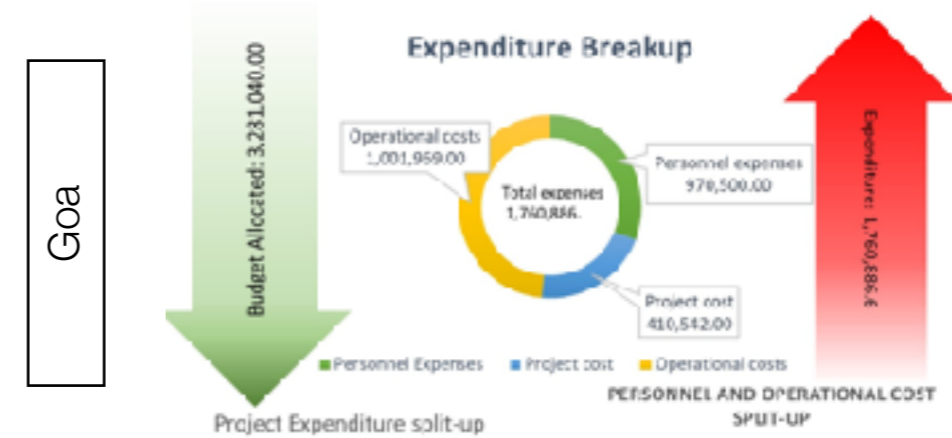
Our Team

Below Left to Right: Stranding Team: Dr. Shantanu Kalambi, Dr. Suranjana Ganguly, Thejaswini S, Manisha R, Viril S, Nester F





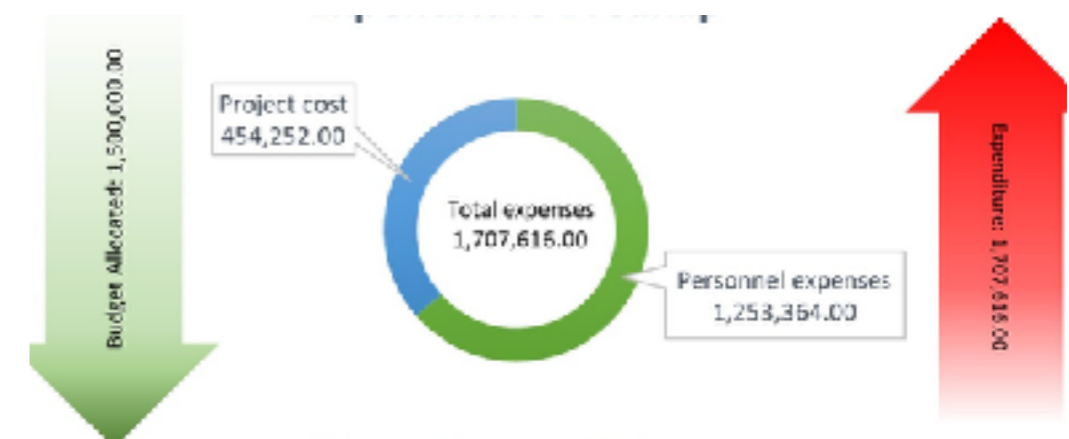
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Andaman Islands



Karnataka



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Thank you for your time and support!

We place great value in the power of collaboration and teamwork in the conservation of India's diverse coastline and marine biodiversity as well as in the upliftment of its coastal communities.

It is only through a multidisciplinary approach - through the collaborative efforts of corporates, NGOs, government agencies, lawyers, artists, engineers, musicians, architects, tech teams and story tellers - that we can transition to being a more caring and conscious community and building a world that is fiercely protective of its natural ecosystems and the health of its oceans.

We urge you to contact us if you share this vision and would like to contribute your time, expertise or money towards this shared goal.

Please reach out to our Executive Director on nayantara@reefwatchindia.org or our team on admin@reefwatchindia.org to begin a dialogue.