

Ocean Optics & Mavericks Diving

Special Maldives, Manta & Whale Shark Safari on board Sea Queen

27 Oct to 9 Nov 2007 • 8 places only • 12 nights • £2,770 + taxes

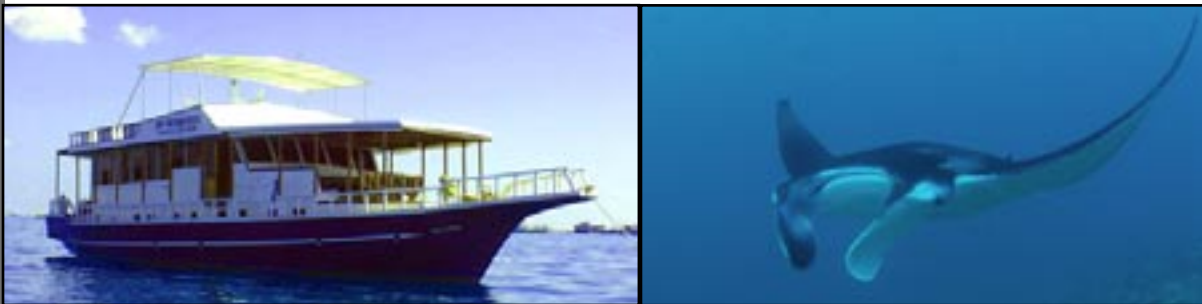


photo: Mark Koekemoer

Ocean Optics – Mavericks Diving has organised a unique charter* to seek out and photograph Manta Rays and Whale Sharks in the Maldivian Islands. The charter will be led by renowned manta researcher Anne – Marie Kitchen-Wheeler. Mark Koekemoer will be on board representing Ocean Optics – Mavericks Diving.

A unique benefit of this trip is that only eight places are available. Although Sea Spirit's normal guest complement is twelve, we believe that much greater photographic opportunities and better interactions will be possible with fewer divers in the water. By engaging Anne – Marie we are stacking the odds of highly successful encounters in your favour. She will be known to many of our clients as one of Maldivian Scuba Tours most knowledgeable dive guides and for her appearance at Visions in the Sea last year.

Anne – Marie had outlined the goals and a provisional event schedule below, which we hope you will find extremely interesting.

We look forward to hearing from you – but with just eight places available, don't leave it too long!

Best wishes

Steve.

* Booked through Maldivian Scuba tours

See Anne-Marie
Kitchen-Wheeler on the
underwaterchannel.tv

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Manta Ecology Project/Ocean Optics Special Charter November 2007

Since 2001 Anne-Marie Kitchen-Wheeler has been collecting data on the Maldives manta population in order to understand how many mantas are resident in the atolls and start to understand their migration patterns and behaviours. She was a speaker at Dive 2006 and Visions.

Currently, details of over 1200 individual mantas known from the central atolls are stored on an Access database and the research continues. The likely population of the central atolls exceeds 5000 animals and this indicates that the total Maldives population is in the tens of thousands!

Anne-Marie has been able to prove that the same population migrates from east to west throughout the year following the plankton movement and started to describe some novel behaviours including manta hierarchy greetings and demonstration by senior adults animals to juveniles. Her experience around mantas ensure the best possible chance of seeing the animals and having opportunities to passively interact with inquisitive mantas.

Observation data is still being collected whenever mantas are seen and additional day long observations at cleaning stations are sometimes planned in to obtain information on numbers of animals visiting during a day and measuring time spent to clean. These day long observations require small teams of three or four divers to remain at the cleaning station for up to an hour, on a rotation throughout the day. This provides excellent photographic opportunities because so few divers are with the mantas at any one time.

October/November is the end of the South West monsoon and the end of mating season on the east side of the atolls. This is a great time of year to see mantas and whalesharks because the currents are typically quite small and the ocean pressure on the east side is starting to push through clear blue water creating better visibility. Lankan manta point on the east side of north Male atoll is still the best place to see mantas at this time of year and is easily accessed within an hour from the airport! At least six opportunities to dive with the mantas will be made giving all photographers a great chance to capture the best possible photo. There are usually multiple mantas at this site, sometimes more than 20!

Anne-Marie is four times British Women's freediving champion and will also run an evening workshop on breath hold techniques to improve confidence in skin diving.

The Ocean Optics special charter will be focused on allowing photographers maximum small group access to mantas and other elasmobranchs. In addition, there will be a series of evening presentations on manta physiology and identification to help photographers assist Anne-Marie in her research. The safari will also visit Ari atoll to include dives on Maaya Thila and night dive with white tip and grey sharks and visit the south of Ari Atoll to look for whalesharks. A presentation on whaleshark physiology and ecology will also be offered.



Anne-Marie Kitchen-Wheeler



The markings on the ventral (under) side are used for identification. This manta is a well known female with dark mottles in her central abdomen and known as "Bunny".



This is "Chris" one of the early November regulars to look out for.



Whaleshark at Kudadhoo in South Ari