

THE CYCLONE

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THE MANTA TRUST





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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to Issue 6 of *Cyclone Magazine*. This issue is shaped by discovery — the ongoing process of uncovering new knowledge about manta and devil rays, and what that means for how we understand and protect them. From collaborative research revealing the hidden lives of lesser-known species to community-led projects turning encounters into conservation action, we explore how understanding continues to evolve across science, communities, and ocean users.

But discovery is only part of the story. In this issue, we trace what comes next: how knowledge gathered through research and encounters is carried forward into collaboration, connection, and conservation in practice.

In Costa Rica, divers are helping transform manta encounters into long-term protection through community-led initiatives. Mobulid research in the Atlantic highlights how growing collaboration is turning curiosity into projects with real impact. And one of our Cyclone members shares personal stories that show how a single moment in the water can stay with someone long after they've surfaced.

Alongside these features, *Manta Moments* captures the beauty and power of encounters in the wild, while our *Cyclone Member Spotlight* celebrates the passion and support that drives our work. Together, these stories reflect a shared commitment to understanding and protecting manta and devil rays.

With warm regards,

Jasmine Corbett

Media & Communications Manager, Manta Trust



Species Spotlight

In each issue, we spotlight a different species of manta or devil ray, exploring fascinating facts and the latest research that reveals their unique behaviours, habitats, and conservation challenges. Each feature offers fresh insights into the remarkable diversity within this family of ocean giants. Through these in-depth explorations, we aim to enhance understanding, celebrate the extraordinary traits of these species, and highlight the crucial efforts dedicated to their protection. Join us as we uncover the wonders of manta and devil rays and the vital research that drives their conservation forward.



The Atlantic manta ray (*Mobula yarae*) is the newest recognised species of manta ray, formally described in 2025 following more than 15 years of scientific investigation. Found throughout the Caribbean and along the Atlantic coastline of the Americas, from Massachusetts in the United States to southern Brazil, it occurs alongside the oceanic manta ray but appears to occupy a more coastal ecological niche similar to that of the reef manta ray.

An extensive [genetic and morphological study](#) published in 2025 provided the evidence needed to formally recognise the Atlantic manta ray as a distinct species. The research suggests that oceanic manta rays may have colonised productive coastal habitats in the western Atlantic and, over time, diverged into a separate species, mirroring the evolutionary pathway that gave rise to the reef manta ray elsewhere in the world.

The formal description of *Mobula yarae* represents a major milestone in manta ray research and provides an important foundation for future studies into the species' ecology, distribution and conservation needs across the Atlantic Ocean.

Atlantic Manta Ray

Mobula yarae



Small Ray, Big Questions

A major synthesis of Atlantic pygmy devil ray research brings together 36 researchers from 12 countries to clarify the species' identification, distribution, and ecology. By combining historical records, fisheries data, and thousands of validated sightings, the study expands its known range, highlights key coastal habitats, and reveals widespread bycatch pressures across multiple fisheries, underscoring urgent conservation needs.





For decades, the Atlantic pygmy devil ray (*Mobula hypostoma*) has cruised the coastal waters of the Atlantic Ocean, often close to beaches and local fishing communities. Yet despite its broad distribution and proximity to human activities, it remains one of the least understood members of the mobulid family. Published records are scarce, the species is still regularly misidentified, and even fundamental aspects of its biology, ecology and distribution remain poorly known.

In our [newly published study](#), we set out to change that. Bringing together 36 researchers from 12 countries—including universities, government agencies, aquariums, conservation organisations and local monitoring programmes—we assembled the largest synthesis on the species to date. By combining information from more than 300 examined individuals, historical records, fisheries data and thousands of carefully validated observations collected across the Atlantic, we helped clarify what the Atlantic pygmy devil ray is, where it occurs, and why it deserves greater conservation attention.

A first challenge was addressing the widespread misidentification of the species. *Mobula hypostoma* has long been confused with other devil rays throughout its range, complicating monitoring efforts and obscuring its true distribution. Our study helped stabilise its taxonomy through the designation of a neotype (the species' official reference specimen) and brought together the most comprehensive review of its identifying characteristics to date, including external morphology, dentition and gill plate features. By clarifying how to distinguish the Atlantic pygmy devil ray from similar species, we provide practical tools for researchers, fisheries observers and citizen scientists alike.

Once reliable identification was established, we revisited where the species occurs and how it uses its environment. Interestingly, some of the most valuable records did not come from scientific surveys, but from social media. By manually compiling and validating more than 1,500 sightings shared online, we documented the species in 12 new countries and territories,

considerably expanding its known range. The emerging picture is that of a highly coastal devil ray, frequently observed in shallow nearshore waters, including estuaries and coastal lagoons. Recurrent feeding, schooling and courtship behaviour in these productive habitats suggests that they play a central role in the species' life cycle and may represent important conservation priorities.

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IN A FAMILY FAMOUS FOR
ITS GIANTS, IT IS EASY TO
OVERLOOK THE SMALLEST
MEMBERS.

”



Atlantic Manta & Devil Ray Research Coalition

Atlantique established the Atlantic Manta & Devil Ray Research Coalition in collaboration with the Manta Trust to connect researchers and conservation organisations working across the Atlantic. As illustrated on the map, the coalition brings together partners from multiple countries to fill critical knowledge gaps and strengthen the conservation of manta and devil rays throughout the region.



Despite its small size, the Atlantic pygmy devil ray interacts with a wide range of fisheries. Our review documented captures in artisanal gillnets and beach seines, recreational shore- and pier-based fisheries, as well as commercial trawl and longline operations. In some cases, as many as 30 individuals were reported in a single fishing set. Across much of its range, the species appears to be caught primarily as bycatch rather than being actively targeted. Opportunistic use as shark bait also appears to be common in some regions, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico. Yet assessing the true scale of these interactions remains challenging because mobulid catches are often reported at the genus level—or not identified at all. One of the few species-specific datasets available revealed an 83% decline in catch density along the southeastern United States between 2002 and 2022. In West Africa, recent records were extremely scarce despite the species being historically present in the region, raising

concerns about a substantial decline and highlighting the urgent need for improved monitoring.

The Atlantic pygmy devil ray has spent decades hiding in plain sight. Today, we know far more about where it lives, how it can be identified and the threats it faces—but many mysteries remain. How big are populations across the Atlantic? How are they connected? What is the magnitude of bycatch mortality? By establishing a stronger scientific foundation, we hope this work will help guide future research and conservation efforts for one of the most overlooked devil rays.

Words by
**Dr Atlantine
Boggio-Pasqua**
Research Officer
Conservation Ecology





You Have a Role to Play in the **Protection of Manta Rays**



If you have ever been in the water with a manta ray, you already understand something difficult to put into words. When a manta turns toward you and passes close enough to reveal the unique spot pattern on its belly, something shifts. Your heartbeat changes. Your sense of what you are responsible for changes too.

That moment is not an accident. It is the beginning of a genuine connection between a human being and a living ecosystem, and it is one of the most powerful conservation tools we have. That's why we're launching the Manta Conservation Explorer: a

new e-learning course and PADI Distinctive Speciality from ConnectOcean, developed in partnership with the Manta Trust.

Discover • Connect • Protect

The e-learning course and PADI speciality are built around three stages – Discover, Connect, and Protect. This framework reflects human nature: we protect what we love, and we love what we understand. Knowledge alone doesn't move people to act. What creates lasting conservation is personal experience, deepened by understanding, transformed over time into genuine connection.



Curiosity is the spark. Through the e-learning modules and guided in-water sessions, participants will learn more about manta and devil rays and how they can contribute to their protection through citizen science. Every sighting has the ability to contribute to the Manta Trust's global identification database, building our knowledge and understanding of these animals, and turning discovery into contribution. You don't need a PhD to add meaningful knowledge to the scientific record. You need a mask, fins, and the motivation to take part.



Every manta ray carries a unique pattern of spots on its underside, a fingerprint that never changes. By photographing these markings and contributing them to the global identification database, participants begin to know individual animals. The manta that returns to the cleaning station this year may be the same one recorded here three years ago. This shift, from encountering a species to knowing an individual, creates a connection that no documentary can replicate.



A strong connection to these animals gives people personal motivation to contribute towards their protection. Participants will emerge from the PADI Distinctive Speciality as equipped ocean stewards: uploading photo ID images, sharing their knowledge with their communities, and understanding what it takes to help establish a Community Protected Area of their own. Here in Costa Rica, the data submitted through citizen science contributes to the Marine Protected Area proposal ConnectOcean and the Manta Trust are building for the Las Catalinas Islands.

The Goal: Community Protected Areas

In Guanacaste, the waters around Las Catalinas Islands are among the few places in the Pacific where oceanic manta rays aggregate seasonally. The goal of our work in this region is to turn this extraordinary natural heritage into something formally and permanently protected, through the communities who live, work, and dive here.

Every Community Protected Area established in Guanacaste becomes a link in the chain of grassroots protection the global 30x30 initiative requires. One dive site adopted by one community is a small thing. A thousand such sites, connected across coastlines and coordinated by shared commitment to the ocean, is a force large enough to change what the ocean looks like for the next generation. The course gives participants the knowledge to take part in that process themselves, helping to establish a Community Protected Area of their own.

“Conservation that is built by communities, for their own ecosystems, with their own hands and their own data, tends to last. It tends to grow.”

In Partnership with the Manta Trust

The Manta Trust is a global conservation charity dedicated to manta ray research and protection across more than 25 countries. Through our partnership, every photograph taken and submitted by programme participants enters the world’s largest manta ray identification database, building the long-term population dataset that underpins real conservation policy. Local encounters in Guanacaste become global science. Your dive becomes evidence.



Words by
Ernst van der Poll
ConnectOcean
Project Leader



© Michel Guerrero



© ConnectOcean



© Guy Stevens



Come and Discover

The Manta Conservation Explorer will be open to everyone who loves the ocean: certified divers and beginners, long-time residents and first-time visitors. The ocean asks only for your attention, your presence, and your willingness to be amazed.

The manta rays that visit these waters seasonally are one of the most visible expressions of an extraordinary living world. They are also one of its most urgent needs. You have a role to play in protecting them, not because you are obligated, but because once you have seen them, you will want to.

The manta and devil ray e-learning course will be launching soon as a stand-alone course, giving participants the opportunity to develop their knowledge on manta and devil rays and the conservation efforts surrounding these animals. The PADI Distinctive Speciality will be launched at a later date, offering participants practical in-water training, in addition to the knowledge gained through the e-learning course. Keep an eye on the Manta Trust's socials and newsletter for details!

“

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REEF MANTA RAYS (*MOBULA ALFREDI*) CHAIN FEEDING IN MAKUNUDHOO, MALDIVES

© Jasmine Corbett

Manta Moments

In every issue, we showcase a hand-picked collection of our favourite manta encounters from around the world, brought to life through breathtaking photography by our dedicated team.

Each image tells a powerful story, capturing not only the beauty and grace of these gentle giants but also the urgency of protecting them. Through these evocative visuals, we hope to spark curiosity, inspire awe, and deepen understanding of the challenges manta and devil rays face. Let these extraordinary encounters renew your connection to the ocean and fuel a shared commitment to safeguarding manta rays for generations to come.



ATLANTIC PYGMY DEVIL RAYS
(MOBULA HYPOSTOMA) GATHER
AT THE SHORE IN FLORIDA

© Jeff Waldorff





AN OCEANIC MANTA RAY (*MOBULA BIROSTRIS*) CRUISES PAST A DIVER IN FUVAHMULAH, MALDIVES

© Simon Hilbourne





Cyclone Member Spotlight

As much as we love sharing the behind-the-scenes of our work, we are equally inspired by YOU — the people who support it. In this issue, we meet Andreea Rinke, whose first encounter with manta rays in the Maldives left a lasting impression and sparked a deep commitment to their protection. From that moment in the water to her ongoing support for the Manta Trust, her story reflects how powerful a single experience can be in shaping a lifelong connection to the ocean.

Have you ever had the chance to see a manta ray in the wild? If so, can you share a memory that stands out as particularly special?

Oh yes, I saw the first manta rays of my life in the Maldives in 2023, at a cleaning station. There were four of them—one was pregnant—and I was moved to tears by how beautifully they danced before our eyes and how close they came on their own, gliding right over my head.

What first inspired you to get involved with the Manta Trust? Was there a particular moment or experience that sparked your passion for manta conservation?

I fell in love with these animals instantly; I read

everything I could about them and ordered Guy's book—which I greatly admired—and that prompted me to support them regularly.

Supporting manta and devil ray conservation is a powerful commitment. What motivates you personally to stand behind this cause?

I am deeply fascinated by how these trusting creatures glide through the water with their mouths wide open to feed—even amidst floating plastic bags—and by how defenceless they are when they end up in fishermen's nets with little chance of survival, being killed senselessly; all of this makes me want to help them in some way.

If you could describe the work of the Manta Trust in one word, what would it be?

Passion.

For someone who has never seen a manta before, how would you describe their presence in the water? What makes them unique in your eyes?

A gigantic, gentle giant of a creature—sometimes curious, drawing closer, and gliding through the water with a trusting nature that leaves one dumbfounded.

ANDREA TAKING IN THE LANDSCAPES
DURING A MANTA EXPEDITION IN
RAJA AMPAT, INDONESIA





THE DIVE TEAM
IN RAJA AMPAT



ANDREEA WITH A
HAWKSBILL TURTLE



ANDREEA MET THE MANTA
TRUST TEAM AT SHARKS
INTERNATIONAL, SRI LANKA



As a supporter of the Manta Trust's mission, what are your hopes for the future of manta and devil rays?

I hope that more and more people learn about these animals, and discover how beautiful and worthy of protection they are—I hope that others fall in love with them and want to protect them.

Do you have a favourite quote or saying about the ocean that inspires you?

I like this idea: everything comes and goes like waves, but in truth, we—and everything in life—are like a wave in the very same ocean, and we are all interconnected, made of the same substance.

If you could be any sea creature for a day, what would you choose and why?

I would love to be a black morph oceanic manta.

There are so many incredible species of manta and devil rays. Do you have a favourite? What draws you to that species?

The oceanic mantas at Socorro. So incredibly beautiful, elegant, large, curious, and trusting.

Have you had the opportunity to meet a member of the Manta Trust team in person or collaborate on one of our campaigns or initiatives? What was your experience like?

Yes, I met many members of the Manta Trust Team at Sharks International in Sri Lanka in May 2026. They were all incredibly dedicated and enthusiastic manta ray lovers, full of energy and engagement! Wonderful exchanges and encounters – thank you for this experience.

Finally, what message would you share with others who are thinking about supporting the conservation of manta and devil rays?

We humans can destroy so much, but we can also do so much good and offer so much support. Let's do it right. Let's help now!



Words by
Andreea Rinke
Cyclone Member





Member

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Benefits



Enjoy Your Exclusive Cyclone Member Perks!

As a valued member of The Cyclone, you're already making a huge difference for manta rays—and we want to thank you with some exclusive perks.

You can enjoy a Buy One, Get One Free offer on our Maldives Manta Adoption Packs. Adopt a manta for yourself and receive a second Digital Adoption Pack free (worth £30)—a perfect gift for a friend or loved one. Each pack includes a personalised certificate, manta facts, and sighting updates.

You also receive an exclusive 10% discount on everything in the Manta Trust Clothing Store, including eco-friendly t-shirts, tote bags, and more. Every purchase helps support our conservation work and spread awareness of manta ray protection.

Additionally, to mark Plastic Free July, we're offering a special one-off reward for a very limited time. From **8th–15th July**, spend £35 or more and we'll add our bestselling reusable tote bag to your order for free—encouraging small, lasting changes that reduce plastic use. Use code: **MANTATOTE**.

Thank you for being such an important part of The Cyclone. Together, we're creating a brighter future for manta rays and their ocean home.



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mantatrust.org/adopt-a-manta

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Join Team Manta and turn your next challenge into ocean conservation. Access discounted charity places at hundreds of UK events through RunForCharity, and every pound you raise helps protect threatened manta and devil rays.

www.mantatrust.org/sporting-challenges

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fish-people.com/collections/manta-trust



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Thank you for your generous support! Your Cyclone Membership is helping us protect manta rays and preserve marine habitats. Every contribution fuels research, conservation, and education around the world. Together, we're making a difference for our oceans and future generations. Thank you for standing with us!

