

## Biosphere Expeditions: Matthias Hammer

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**From:** Reef Check Headquarters [newsletter@reefcheck.org]  
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### Successful EcoExpedition in the Maldives



*By Kate Curnow, Biosphere Expeditions*

In September, [Biosphere Expeditions](#), together with the [Marine Conservation Society](#) and the [Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme](#), undertook its inaugural Reef Check survey, studying some of the expansive reefs of the 1192 beautiful Maldivian islands.

Coral reef structures of the Maldives archipelago are extraordinarily diverse and rich. Such structures include submerged coral mounds, often rising 50 m from the seabed to 10 m from the surface (thilas), mounds that reach the surface (giris) and large barrier reefs, which surround these structures on the perimeter of the atolls, some of which are up to 20 km long. The islands of the Maldives are entirely made from the coral sand washed up onto the very

shallowest coral platforms.

Although the 26 coral atolls that make up the Maldives comprise a rich mixture of spectacular corals and a multitude of fish and other animals, the Maldives government identified a need for further research and monitoring work as far back as 1997. Biosphere Expeditions is helping to address this need.

The expedition kicked off with a press conference to launch an [educational booklet](#). Ibrahim Ismail, Deputy Minister of Education, officially accepted the booklet at the conference on behalf of the Maldivian government. Ismail expressed great enthusiasm towards the booklet, the expedition and the participants.

From there the first team, which consisted of both international and local volunteers, went onto the live-aboard base. It was straight into Reef Check training, swapping classroom with dive sessions, learning Reef Check's indicator fish, invertebrates and substrates.

After training was completed, the newly certified Indo-Pacific EcoDivers formed three teams to conduct surveys at three different depths. Included in these surveys were permanent Reef Check monitoring sites at Rasdhoo and Dega thila. You name it, Rasdhoo has it - HC, RKC, SC, SP, NIA (for those in the know) sharks, rays, humphead wrasse, great fish diversity and beautiful coral gardens. Dr. Jean-Luc Solandt, expedition scientist and Reef Check coordinator for the Maldives since 2005 said, "Results showed little change in the condition of these reefs, both in coral health and fish populations."



"We managed to visit 10 other sites where there was a wide variation in both coral populations and reef fish populations. Our plans for next year will be to visit the healthier of the sites visited, and visit some new sites in South Male atoll." Solandt continued, "Furthermore, our surveys revealed two sightings of whale sharks off south Mamigili that were previously identified by the Maldives Whale Shark Research Project."

"All data from the Reef Check surveys and whale shark surveys have been sent to relevant in-country and international partners. This data will be used at international, regional and national levels to provide a 'status report' on the health of Maldivian reefs."

The team gained an excellent understanding of coral reef ecosystems. Thank you to the team and the super support crew.

The Maldives expedition is one of four organized by Biosphere Expeditions. Upcoming expeditions are to Musandam, Oman, in October, Malaysia in March 2012 and Honduras in May 2012. If you are interested in joining an expedition, please visit <http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/>

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