

Project Update: May 2021

The cleaning station areas in this diving region of Mozambique are thriving with life – even whilst diving on these reefs it is possible to see some of the rarest and peculiar marine fish in the world, the guitarfishes. During only our first few deployments of these remote cameras on the reef we have seen an array of wildlife that, without any diver disturbance, have spent hours circling through the cleaning stations getting their wounds and parasites cleaned by the cleaner reef fish.



Here we can see a giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*) and whitespotted wedgefish (*Rhynchobatus laevis*) passing through the cleaning stations on reefs no deeper than 30 m.

Observing the natural, undisturbed behaviours of these rare animals, in particular the guitarfishes (which includes wedgefish species), will show us the value of these shallow-water environments. These reefs are exploited by both local, small-scale gillnet fishers and the large international trawling vessels. We have a long way to go and lots more animals to observe through these shallow-water areas, but the Mozambican Government is listening to the science. As of January 2021, all species of mobulids (including both species of manta ray that occur in this area) are officially protected and are illegal to fish. Also all dolphin species, some shark and some bony fish are protected. Although this is fantastic progress, many more critically endangered species are residing in these reefs and are in desperate need of protection. This study will help in both providing the biodiversity and frequency of visitations to the reef areas by these critically endangered and rare species but also provide the physical evidence of their behaviours for educating the local fishers and, perhaps someday, help extinguish the market demand for these unique and wonderful marine species.



