Ocean Country Partnership Programme

Protected, Endangered and Threatened (PET) Mobile Marine Species in Sri Lanka Community Workshops Report

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Date: January 2026

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Recommended citation:
Herath, I., Peiris, A., Meecle, D. & Wimalarathne. A. (2025) Protected, Endangered and Threatened (PET) Mobile Marine Species in Sri Lanka Community Workshops Report.

Funding Acknowledgement:
This project was funded with UK International Development from the UK Government.

Evidence Quality Assurance:
This report is compliant with JNCC's Evidence Quality Assurance Policy https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/corporate-information/evidence-quality-assurance/

Ocean Country Partnership Programme:
The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood.

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Acknowledgement

This work was developed by the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) in collaboration with Oceanswell Sri Lanka. We are thankful to the OCPP partners for their support, with funding provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

We appreciate the engagement of the Principal of Nirmala Matha Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya, Kalpitiya, along with the dedicated teachers who were instrumental in encouraging student involvement. We also extend our sincere appreciation to Mr Sumudu Priyashantha, Harbour Manager, Kalpitiya Fishery Harbour, for facilitating participant engagement, providing the venue for the community workshops at the Kalpitiya Fishery Harbour premises, and coordinating with the local community to disseminate information about the workshop. Additionally, we would like to thank Mr Samith Fernando and Mr W. M. Raj for facilitating contact with the divers and tour guides for the workshop activities.

Moreover, we extend our appreciation to Ms P. Munasingha, Principal of Thalalla South Maha Vidyalaya, and the dedicated teachers for motivating students to participate in the program. Our sincere thanks also go to Mr P. Punchohewa, Harbour Manager of Suduwella Fishery Harbour, for his support, as well as Mr Mukiz Mukzeeth for assisting with establishing connections with the school teachers in Panama, and Mr Y. Kajendra for helping to organise the community outreach by connecting with the fishing community and coordinating the school outreach program. Our appreciation also goes to the Principal of Panama Maha Vidyalaya for allowing us to conduct the outreach programs and for facilitating all necessary arrangements.

We express our deepest gratitude to all local stakeholders, teachers, and students for their enthusiastic participation and meaningful discussions on the conservation of protected, endangered, and threatened mobile marine species in Sri Lanka.

1. Overview

Protected, Endangered, and Threatened (PET) species in Sri Lanka include marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds, which require urgent conservation attention due to declining populations and increasing human impacts. The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP), implemented by Oceanswell and funded by the UK's Blue Planet Fund through Defra, conducted a series of workshops in October 2025 to raise awareness of PET marine species among coastal communities and school students in Kalpitiya, Dickwella, and Panama.

The workshops targeted community members, including fishermen, divers, tour guides, and harbour workers, and school students, with a total of 258 participants across the six sessions. School workshops engaged students from Grades 8 and 9, many of whom came from fishing families and had limited prior knowledge of marine mammals and seabirds. Each session included a pre-test and post-test with 15 multiple-choice questions to assess learning, educational presentations on marine species and conservation laws, and interactive discussions.

Findings from the workshops revealed several key conservation challenges. Participants reported frequent entanglement of sea turtles and dolphins in fishing gear, limited understanding of seabird species, and inconsistent reporting of stranded or entangled animals. The sessions also highlighted local concerns, such as the impacts of whale watching, the poaching of sea turtle eggs, and the need for greater enforcement of conservation laws.

The workshops demonstrated the value of combining educational presentations with opportunities for participants to share knowledge gained through their experiences. Post-test results showed improvements in knowledge across all groups, reflecting the effectiveness of the workshops in raising awareness. Feedback indicated interest among students and fishermen in continuing conservation efforts and contributing to the sustainable management of marine ecosystems.

Overall, the programme underscored the importance of continued education, community engagement, and collaborative approaches that integrate traditional knowledge with conservation science to enhance the protection of Sri Lanka's marine biodiversity.

2. Objectives

This OCPP-funded project aims to:

- Provide technical advice for the conservation and management of PET mobile marine species in Sri Lanka.
- Strengthen capacity-building initiatives to enhance marine conservation efforts.
- Provide fundamental knowledge regarding PET species to the coastal communities and students in the region.

3. Methods

3.1 PowerPoint Presentation Preparation for the Workshops

A PowerPoint presentation was created for the workshops using pre-existing content from the Phase I package of support in 2024, which focused on local coastal communities who primarily spoke Sinhala. For the 2025 workshop, the materials were translated into Tamil to allow a focus on local coastal communities who primarily speak Tamil.

The presentation included the following topics:

- Introduction to marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds.
- Adaptations for ocean life.
- Species diversity and distribution in Sri Lankan waters.
- Ecological significance.
- Threats facing these species.
- Conservation and protective measures.
- Legal frameworks and protection.

3.2 Conducting Workshops

Workshops were conducted for both adults and school children in coastal communities across three districts in Sri Lanka. The selected areas were Kalpitiya, in Puttalam District, Dickwella, in Matara District, and Panama, in Ampara District (see Figure 1).

Kalpitiya, situated on a peninsula on Sri Lanka's northwest coast, has extensive seagrass beds, fringing mangroves and corals. It has several protected areas covering marine habitats and wetlands. It was chosen to ensure representation of a local community on the northwest. Local coastal communities traditionally fish for their livelihoods. But Kalpitiya peninsula is now a popular tourism location for whale and dolphin tours alongside water sports such as kitesurfing and diving.

Dickwella was selected as it is one of the major fishing hubs along Sri Lanka's southern coastline, supporting both small-scale and multi-day fishing operations. The surrounding coastal belt, including Hiriketiya Beach and Blue Beach Island, is also a popular tourism hotspot.

Panama, situated at the southeastern tip of Sri Lanka, was chosen as it represents the last coastal community along the southeast region. The village primarily relies on fisheries and agriculture and hosts the only sea turtle hatchery on the southeastern coast. However, the area has also experienced incidents of sea turtle egg poaching, highlighting the urgent need for community-based conservation efforts. Additionally, its proximity to Kumana National Park, a Ramsar-listed wetland renowned for its exceptional diversity of migratory and seabird species, further emphasises the importance of enhancing community awareness to safeguard this ecologically sensitive region.

School workshops were organised in collaboration with school principals and teachers, with support from the relevant zonal educational departments. Participants for the community

workshops were contacted through harbour managers and through known community members to ensure strong engagement and trust. This combined approach ensured broad community and school representation and intentionally prioritised Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) by engaging male and female participants from diverse age groups.

To assess the participants' learning progress and knowledge improvement, a pre-test and post-test were conducted before and after the workshop. The pre-test consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions (MCQs) covering topics related to marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds, to be completed within 15 minutes. This was followed by a 50-minute presentation and a 5-minute question-and-answer session. Following this, the same test was given as a post-test to evaluate knowledge gained from the workshop. Finally, 5 minutes were allocated to review the answers for the test.

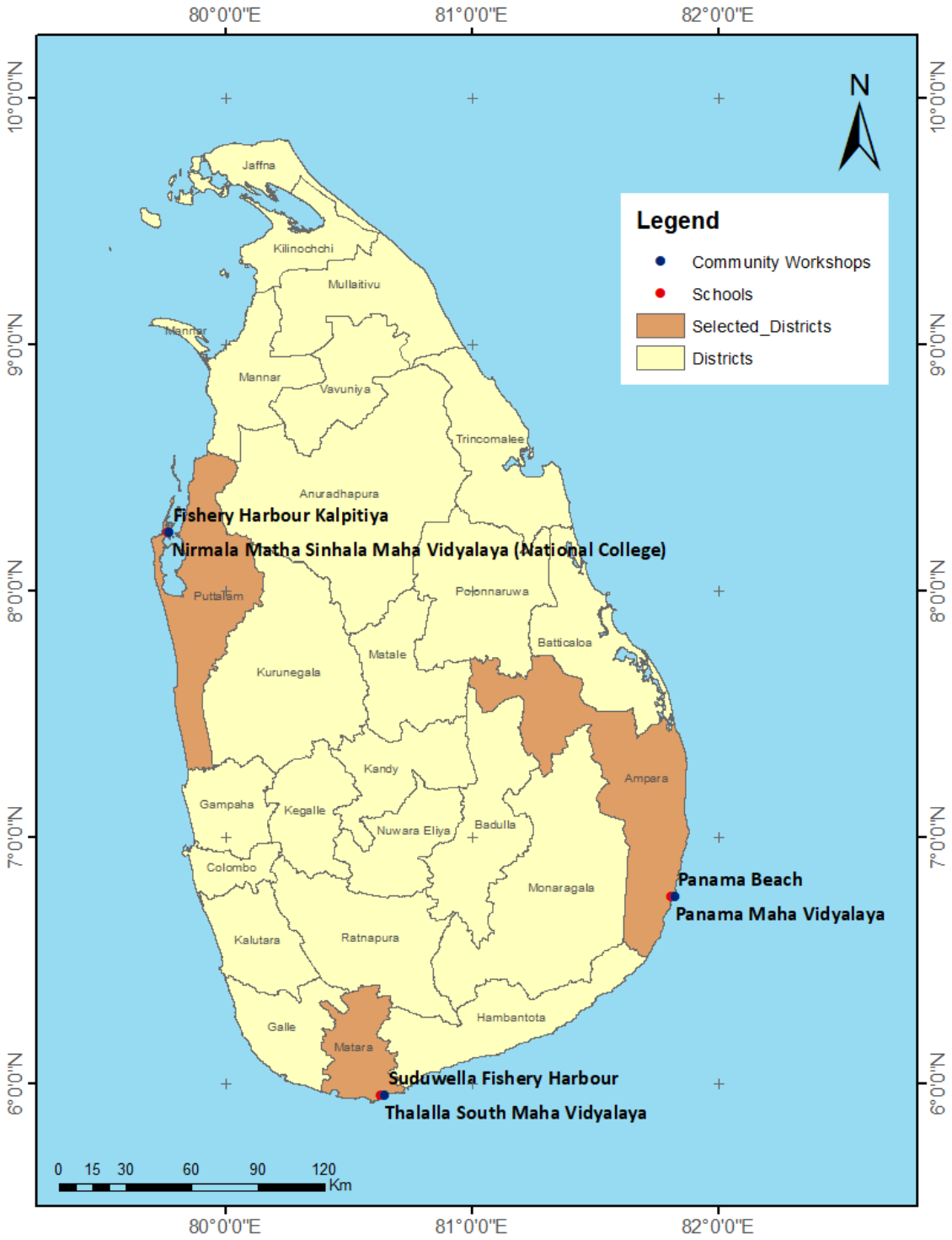

Figure 1. Map of the selected coastal districts in Sri Lanka showing the locations of schools and community workshops conducted under the OCPP.

4 Workshop Reports

4.1 Community Workshops

4.1.1 Workshop 1 – Kalpitiya – Puttalam District

Date: 14 October 2025

Time: 03:00 p.m. – 05:00 p.m.

Venue: Fishery Harbour Kalpitiya

Target Audience: Fishermen, divers, tour guides, and fishery harbour workers

4.1.1.1 Summary

The 18 workshop attendees were fishermen, divers, tour guides, and fishery harbour workers. They showed keen interest in the presentation and actively engaged throughout the session, participating in discussions and offering suggestions and ideas to improve future research and activities (Figure 2).

4.1.1.2 Group Discussion

During the workshop, an incident between a diver operator and tourists who had come to dive with whales elicited a discussion on the legality of swimming with whales in Sri Lanka. This led to a discussion with the team about the rules and regulations related to diving with whales, as it is illegal in Sri Lanka. Further discussions focused on research permit requirements, and the proper procedures to obtain such permits for marine research were provided to the participants. The tour guides also mentioned the presence of extensive seagrass beds stretching from Kalpitiya to Mannar, where dugongs are inhabitants. They said they have a video showing a dugong swimming with its four calves, and they had given this video to the 'Travel with Chathura' television program. They suggested that it would be beneficial if organisations could conduct further research on dugongs in these areas.

In addition, they highlighted the presence of a pod of humpback dolphins, locally known as 'Kabara Mulla', and recommended conducting research on them before their population declines. They proposed studies such as exploring the areas where humpback dolphins spend more time and estimating their population to better understand these dolphins.

As tourism guides, they emphasised that marine animals such as whales, dolphins, and dugongs are vital to their livelihoods and the local economy. They mentioned that they have a good understanding of whale and dolphin behaviour gained through years of guiding experience, which helps them share accurate information with tourists. However, they admitted that their knowledge about seabirds is limited and requested that a booklet on seabirds be provided so they could enhance their understanding and share the information with tourists.

They also expressed concern about boats that travel at night, which can cause habitat disturbances, especially when anchors damage coral reefs. Although they had reported these issues to the Coast Guard and the Department of Wildlife Conservation, no action had been taken. They requested that steps be taken to address this issue.

Additionally, questions from Table 1 were asked, and the participants responded well. Their feedback has been transcribed in Table 2.

Table 1. Questions and participant responses at the Kalpitiya community workshop.

Number	Question	Answer
01	Have you ever seen a dead marine mammal, sea bird, or turtle?	Yes, dead sea turtles have been observed. Within the last year, six dugongs have died and been stranded along the beach.
02	If yes, when you find the dead animal, what do you do?	Yes, we usually inform the Department of Wildlife Conservation. However, sometimes, before the department is notified, fishermen and members of the coastal community collect the animals for meat.
03	Have you ever seen marine animals washed up on the beach or entangled in nets? If so, were they alive or dead?	Yes, usually released from the nets and also observed marine animals, such as sea turtles, washed up on the beach.
04	Do you often see stranded or entangled marine animals?	Yes, we don't really know how often, but we saw one or two during a trip. Within the last year, six dugongs have died and stranded on the beach.
05	Do you know if you can report this information to the authorities? It is very valuable information for us to continue to understand these animals.	Yes, we report on sea turtles and dolphins, but we don't have any idea about seabirds. After a boat ride, we report in detail in the data sheet, but we do not include any information or data about seabirds.
06	Do you know where to report any dead animals?	Yes, to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.
07	Have you seen any live animals while out at sea? Do you report these to anyone? If yes, to whom?	Yes, to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.
08	Have you learnt anything new in this workshop? If yes, is there something you will share with your family and children when you get home?	Yes, as feedback, the participants stated that the program was very informative and that they learned a lot about marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds. They also mentioned that they learned many new things they had not known before. They appreciated how clearly the topics were explained in a way everyone could understand. They suggested allocating more time for such sessions and requested that similar awareness programs be conducted again, especially for school children in the Kalpitiya area. Finally, they expressed their gratitude to the Oceanswell team for organising and delivering the program.

Table 2 Transcribed feedback from the Kalpitiya community workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	Today's program was very informative and taught me a lot about turtles and seabirds. So, thank you to Oceanwell and all of you who came.
02	This program is very good. We learned a lot of things we didn't know. Please do more programs like this. Thank you very much to your organisation for doing such a program.
03	Thank you. For learning important things. Learn a lot.
04	Really good program. I gained a lot of knowledge. Excellent. It would have been great if there had been more time.
05	Really good workshop. I am an underwater dive master. I gained a lot of knowledge about sea birds. When I get something special, I will send some clips for your future travels.
06	A very important program. It is taught very clearly in a way that everyone can understand. I am currently working as a dive master. I think it would be good if this program was also made into an awareness program for children in our area. If we educate the younger generation, they will learn not to abuse the ocean with things like polythene and nets.
07	Your program, conducted by Oceanswell, really enabled us to learn many things that we did not know before. For that, we are very grateful to you. We wish you continued strength. Really good work. We learned a lot of things we didn't know, even though we were here. Thank you.
08	Humpback dolphins should be protected. It would be good if they could provide a book with sea creatures.
09	We learned a lot of very important things in this short time, and if it is possible to hold another awareness program like this, it would be very important for all those involved in fishing and tourism activities in the Kalpitiya area. (Meeting Dr Asha de Vos in 2000 was very beneficial to my diving career and the diving tourism industry.)
10	I really learned a lot of information and details that I didn't know until now. You all gave us your presentation in a very interesting way. It was a really good program.
11	Thank you for giving me this opportunity. The knowledge I gained is invaluable.
12	The lack of comprehensive data collection on seabirds and mammals in Sri Lanka has led to a significant increase in poaching.

Figure 2. Key moments from the community workshop in Kalpitiya: (a–d) Presenters engaging with participants during outreach sessions, (e) Participants completing the post-test activities, and (f) Handover of the Oceanswell poster to the Kalpitiya fishery harbour.

4.1.1.3 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

A pre-test and post-test were administered to the participants before and after the workshop to evaluate their knowledge gained from the session. Each test consisted of 15 MCQs related to marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds, and participants were given 15 minutes to complete the test. The results obtained from both tests are illustrated in Figure 3.

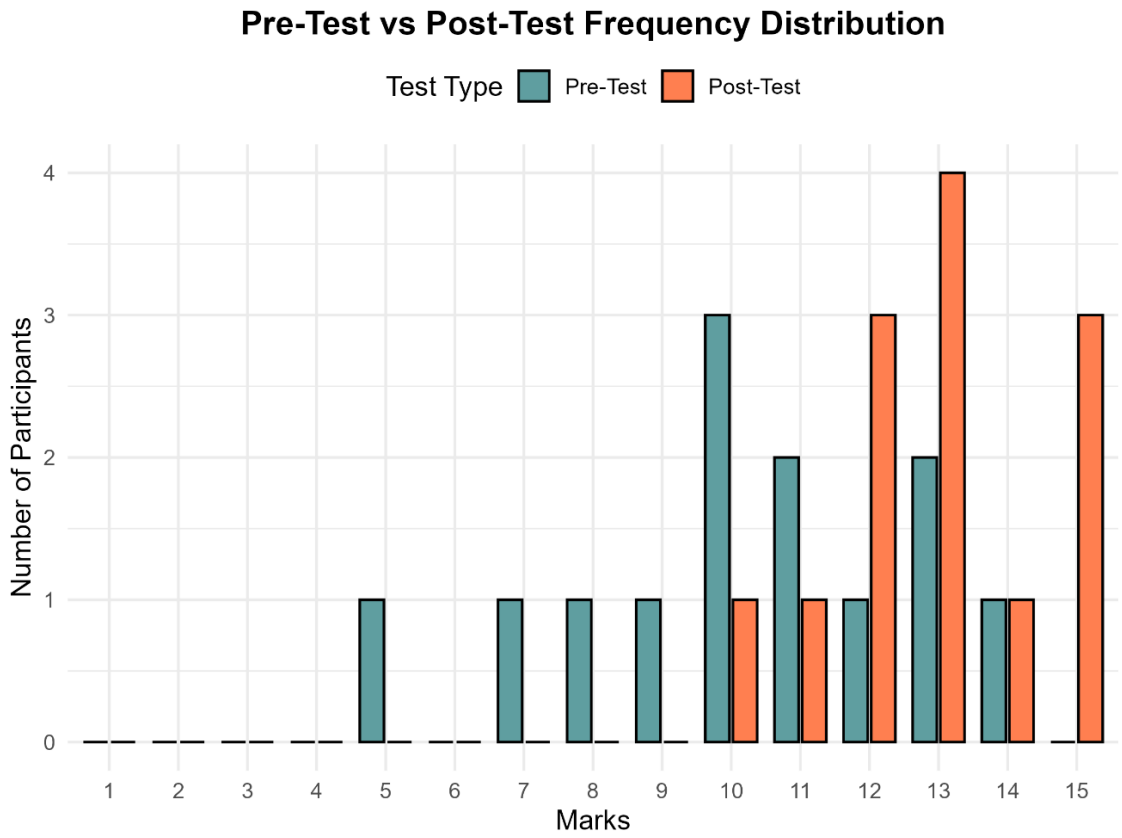

Figure 3. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among participants showing improved performance before and after the workshop.

The bar graph presents the frequency distribution of marks achieved by participants in the pre-test and post-test conducted among the community group. The x-axis represents the marks (1–15), while the y-axis indicates the number of participants who obtained each mark.

Each mark category includes two bars:

- The blue bar represents the pre-test results.
- The orange bar represents the post-test results.

As shown in Figure 3, post-test scores are generally higher and clustered between 10 and 15 marks, whereas pre-test scores are mostly distributed within the lower- and middle-mark ranges (5–11 marks). The distribution of scores (ranging from 1 to 15) for both tests. The mean pre-test score was 10.2 ± 2.4, while the mean post-test score increased to 12.9 ± 1.5, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the results demonstrate a positive learning outcome and highlight the effectiveness of the community awareness workshop in improving participants' understanding of marine species and conservation topics.

4.1.2 Workshop 2 – Dickwella – Matara District

Date: 10 October 2025

Time: 03:00 p.m. – 05:00 p.m.

Venue : Suduwella Fishery Harbour

Target Audience: Fishermen

4.1.2.1 Summary

The workshop was attended by 18 participants, who were fishermen and the harbour master. They showed interest in the presentation and actively engaged throughout the session by participating in discussions (Figure 4).

4.1.2.2 Group Discussion

The fishermen actively engaged in the discussion and shared several issues they face in their daily activities. They mentioned that sea turtles and dolphins often become entangled in their fishing nets. They referred to all terns as “Lihini” and petrels as “Kataya.” The fishermen also recognised the importance of seabirds and dolphins, explaining that they use them to locate fishing grounds. The participants raised questions about why keeping ambergris is illegal and asked about the reasons behind the ban. They also inquired why certain species are prohibited from being caught under specific laws. In response, it was explained that because ambergris is a product derived from a protected species, the sperm whale, its possession and trade are prohibited under national wildlife protection laws in Sri Lanka, particularly the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance (FFPO). This regulation helps prevent the exploitation and killing of endangered whale species. It was further clarified that certain marine species are also protected under the FFPO to conserve biodiversity, maintain ecological balance, and promote the sustainable management of marine resources.

Furthermore, there was an in-depth discussion on marine bycatch, including turtles, seabirds, and dolphins, during which the fishermen explained how they release these animals when they become entangled. In addition, they spoke about inappropriate whale-watching practices, such as boats approaching too closely to the animals and swimming with whales, stating that although they had reported such activities to the authorities and even provided video evidence, no action had been taken. They expressed concern that these activities may be reducing the dolphin population, which in turn could negatively affect their activities, as they rely on dolphins to locate fishing grounds.

Additionally, questions from Table 3 were asked, and the participants responded well. Their feedback has been transcribed in Table 4.

Table 3. Questions and participant responses at the Dickwella community workshop.

Number	Question	Answer
01	Have you ever seen a dead marine mammal, sea bird, or turtle?	Yes, dead sea turtles and dolphins have been observed.
02	If yes, when you find the dead animal, what do you do?	Yes, we usually inform the Department of Wildlife Conservation when we find a dead animal.
03	Have you ever seen marine animals washed up on the beach or entangled in nets? If so, were they alive or dead?	Yes, we have seen dead animals washed up on the beach, mostly sea turtles. Sea turtles, seabirds, and dolphins have also been found entangled in fishing nets. Most turtles and dolphins are found alive, though sometimes they are dead, while seabirds are usually found dead. When animals become entangled, we release them from the nets.

Number	Question	Answer
04	Do you often see stranded or entangled marine animals?	Not often, but we have seen them.
05	Do you know if you can report this information to the authorities? It is very valuable information for us to continue to understand these animals.	Yes, we know that we can report this information to the authorities.
06	Do you know where to report any dead animals?	Yes, to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.
07	Have you seen any live animals while out at sea? Do you report these to anyone? If yes, to whom?	Yes, to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.
08	Have you learnt anything new in this workshop? If yes, is there something you will share with your family and children when you get home?	Yes, as feedback, the participants stated that they gained a lot of new knowledge that they didn't know before. They mentioned that although they were aware of certain laws before, they did not know the reasons behind those legal restrictions. This program helped them understand the importance and purpose of such regulations. They also suggested that when developing new rules, the opinions and experiences of fishermen should be taken into account.

Table 4. Transcribed feedback from the Dickwella community workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	I gained a lot of knowledge through this program held today. I learned things I didn't know.
02	Participated well in the program. Learned a lot of new things. Learned about the law. Love the ocean. We don't do those things anyway.
03	When making rules, take the opinions of fishermen into account and make use of their experiences.
04	The program was good. I learned new things. I knew the law before, but I didn't know the reason why it was banned by law. This program helped me understand the reason. Therefore, awareness programs like this are important.
05	It is very important to educate people about marine life and mammals. I would like to express my special thanks for educating me about the rules and regulations in this regard.

Figure 4. Key moments from the community workshop in Dickwella: (a) Participants completing the pre-test before the presentations began; (b–e) Presenters engaging with participants during the outreach sessions; and (f) Handover of the Oceanswell poster to the Suduwella Fishery Harbour.

4.1.2.3 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The results of the pre-test and post-test are shown in Figure 5 below.

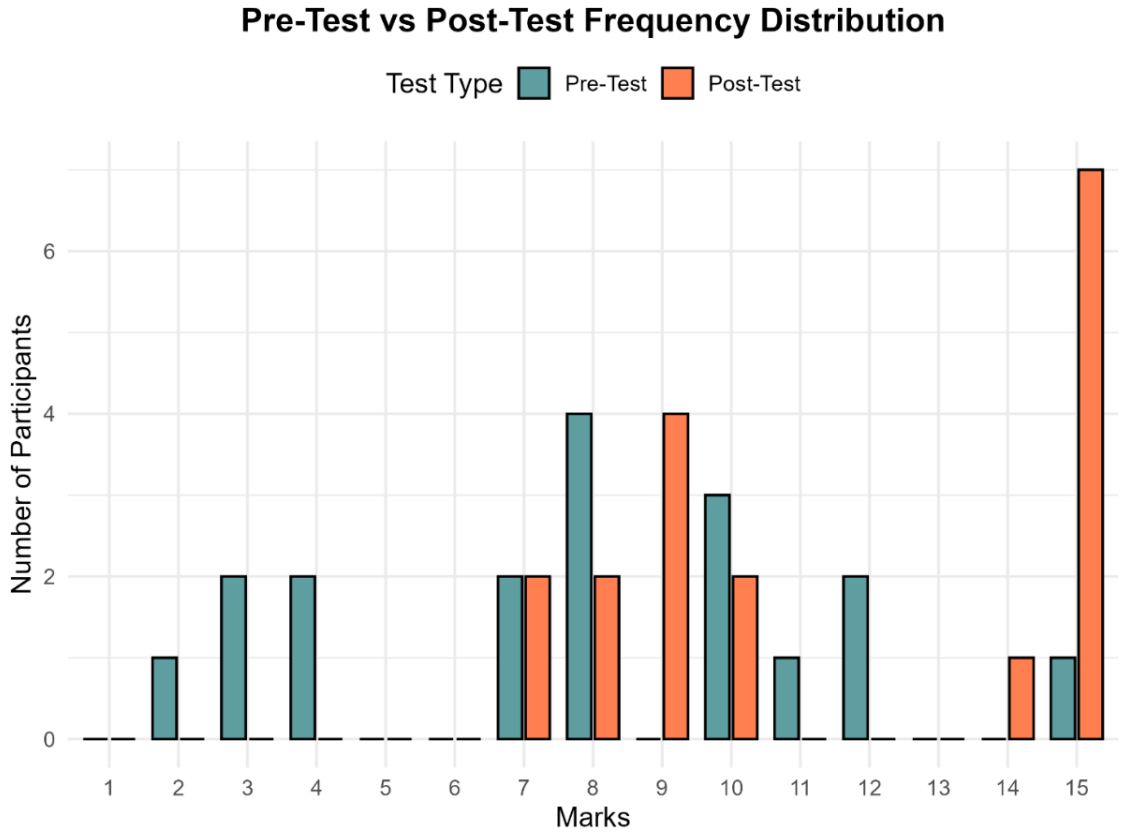

Figure 5. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among participants showing improved performance before and after the Dickwella community workshop.

As shown in Figure 5, pre-test scores were more widely spread, with many participants scoring between 2 and 12 marks, indicating varying levels of prior knowledge. Post-test scores show a noticeable improvement, with most participants scoring between 8 and 15 marks. A large number of participants achieved the highest score (15 marks) after the presentations and discussion, demonstrating an increase in knowledge as a result of the workshop.

The distribution of scores (ranging from 1 to 15) for both tests. The mean pre-test score was 7.9 ± 3.5, while the mean post-test score increased to 11.4 ± 3.2, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the results demonstrate a positive learning outcome and highlight the effectiveness of the community awareness workshop in improving participants' understanding of marine species and conservation topics.

4.1.3 Workshop 3 – Panama – Ampara District

Date: 26 October 2025

Time: 02:00 p.m. – 04:00 p.m.

Venue : Am/Panama Maha Vidyalaya

Target Audience: Fishermen

4.1.3.1 Summary

The workshop was attended by 16 fishermen, who showed interest and actively engaged in discussions (Figure 6).

4.1.3.2 Group Discussion

The fishermen actively took part in the discussion, sharing their experiences and knowledge with us. They mentioned that they often see sea birds and marine mammals, identifying marine mammals through their blows. The fishermen had seen seabirds before but did not know the different species. They also said they didn't know how to release entangled birds, as they had no prior experience with it, so one of our team members demonstrated the correct method. They also said that dolphins sometimes get entangled in fishing nets, but they release them carefully because they know dolphins help locate fishing grounds. They further mentioned that sea turtle egg poaching happens in the Kumana area and that they are trying to reduce it.

Additionally, questions from Table 5 were asked, and the participants responded well. Their feedback has been transcribed in Table 6.

Table 5. Questions asked during the discussion and participant responses at the Panama community workshop.

Number	Question	Answer
01	Have you ever seen a dead marine mammal, sea bird, or turtle?	Yes, dead sea turtles and dolphins have been observed, both stranded on the beach and entangled in fishing nets.
02	If yes, when you find the dead animal, what do you do?	Yes, we usually inform the Department of Wildlife Conservation when we find a dead animal.
03	Have you ever seen marine animals washed up on the beach or entangled in nets? If so, were they alive or dead?	Yes, we have seen dead animals washed up on the beach, mostly sea turtles and dolphins. Sea turtles and dolphins have also been found entangled in fishing nets. Most turtles and dolphins are found alive, though sometimes they are dead. When animals become entangled, we release them from the nets. However, we have not had any experience with seabirds becoming entangled in fishing nets.
04	Do you often see stranded or entangled marine animals?	We don't see them very often, but we have encountered some cases.
05	Do you know if you can report this information to the authorities? It is very valuable information for us to continue to understand these animals.	Yes, we know that we can report this information to the authorities, but although we have informed them, no action has been taken.
06	Do you know where to report any dead animals?	Yes, to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.
07	Have you seen any live animals while out at sea? Do you report these to anyone? If yes, to whom?	Yes, we have seen marine mammals while out at sea, and we report these sightings to the Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Number	Question	Answer
08	Have you learnt anything new in this workshop? If yes, is there something you will share with your family and children when you get home?	Yes, as feedback, the participants stated that the program was very important and emphasised the need to continue such initiatives. They mentioned that through programs like this, the fishing community gains valuable knowledge and awareness about the important marine animals.

Table 6. Transcribed feedback from the Panama community workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	I would like to express that this program, being conducted by Oceanswell, has provided us with many valuable ideas. Through such programs, the fishing community has gained many valuable ideas about the valuable animals in the sea.
02	The program is very important. It is very important to continue programs like this.
03	This program should be repeated.
04	It would be good if this program were made available to all fishermen.
05	I became aware. I learned a lot. I learned about unknown creatures. It was of great value.

Figure 6. Key moments from the community workshop in Panama: (a) Introduction to the outreach program; (b) Participants completing the pre-test before the presentations began; (c–e) Presenters engaging with participants during the outreach sessions; and (f) Discussion session with participants.

4.1.3.3 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The results of the pre-test and post-test are shown in Figure 7 below.

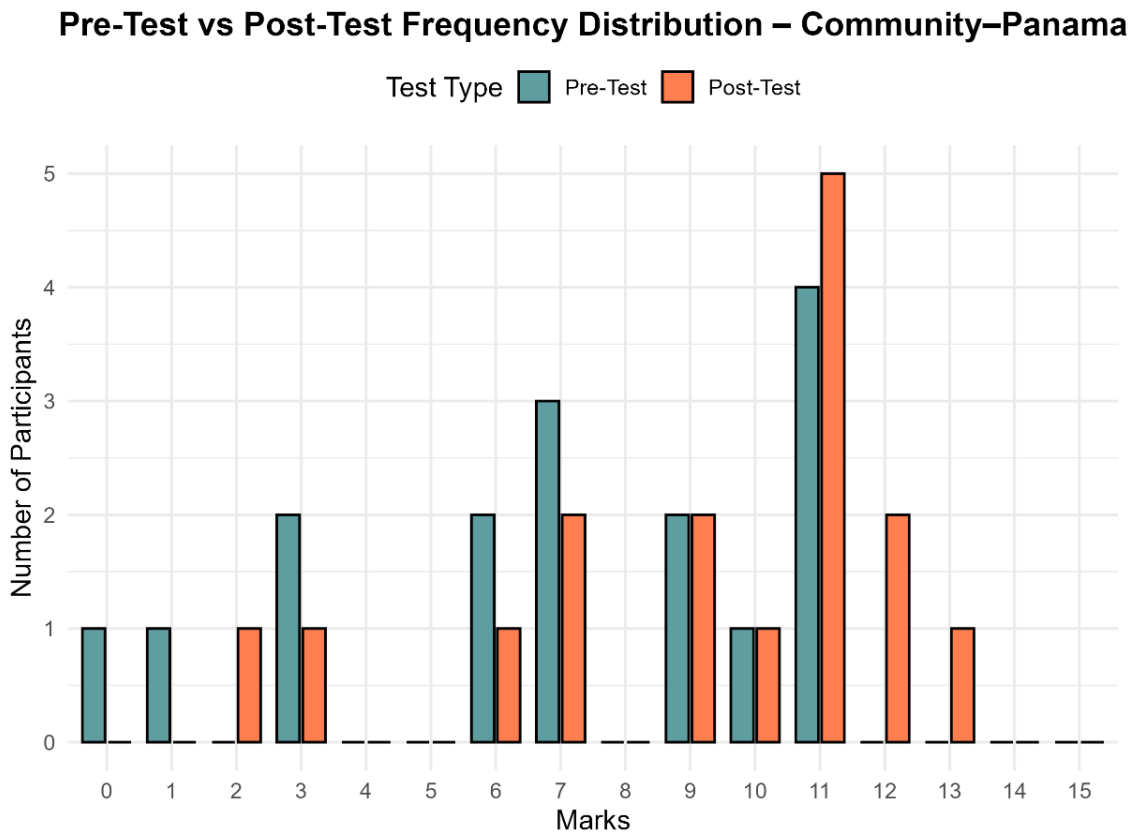

Figure 7. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among participants showing improved performance before and after the Panama community workshop.

As shown in Figure 7, in the pre-test, most participants scored between 6 and 11 marks, indicating moderate prior knowledge. In the post-test, there was a noticeable improvement, with more participants scoring higher marks, particularly around 11 to 12 marks. Lower scores (1–5) were more common in the pre-test and reduced after the workshop.

The scores for both tests ranged from 1 to 15. The mean pre-test score was 7.4 ± 3.1, while the mean post-test score increased to 9.5 ± 2.6, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the findings reveal a positive learning outcome and confirm the effectiveness of the community awareness workshop in enhancing participants' understanding of marine species and conservation-related topics.

5 School Workshops

5.1 Workshop 4 – Kalpitiya – Puttalam District

Date: 13 October 2025

Time: 09:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Venue : Nirmala Matha Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya (National College)

Target Audience: School Students – Grade 8

5.1.1 Summary

The workshop was attended by 76 students (34 girls and 42 boys), all aged 13. Students showed great enthusiasm and actively participated, with many from fishing families sharing personal experiences with marine species. While most were familiar with marine mammals and sea turtles, knowledge of seabirds was limited. Students found the workshop valuable, learning new information about the sea and its creatures (Figure 8). They appreciated the explanations and pictures and suggested similar workshops for other children, including short videos in future sessions. To assess their learning progress, the same pre-test and post-test evaluations were conducted here, and some student feedback is transcribed in Table 7.

Table 7. Transcribed Feedback from the Kalpitiya School Workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	Through this program, I gained new knowledge about marine life that I was not aware of. I express my gratitude for this. One day, please teach this program to children like us and help them increase their knowledge. Thank you, I hope to see you again one day on another program like this one.
02	The program was very good. We learned a lot of things we didn't know. We will share what we learned with others. We saw animals we had never seen before in pictures today. I hope you will do more things like this again. Thank you.
03	The things we were taught are very valuable, because in just a short time, we were taught everything we didn't know. We learned a lot of things about the environment that we didn't know. Thank you for taking the time to teach us about each animal.
04	We learned a lot from this program. The way you spoke made us feel loved. I thought this was the best program. We learned a lot from the program you did.
05	This program was very useful. I got the opportunity to learn many things that I didn't know. But I hoped it would last longer. I am happy to have participated.
06	This program also featured pictures of sea animals that we had not seen before. We also asked about the protection of the animals that were on the program and the threats they face. Oceanswell taught us about marine animals and the animals that live in the sea. They also taught us about what to eat. This program taught us about questions and answers to questions.
07	The program was really good. We learned things we didn't know about the sea. We also learned about the animals and birds that live in the sea. I actually knew about the sea, but I didn't know about the animals that live in it. Today I understood this lesson very well. And you also taught me how to protect them. Thank you for doing such programs for us. And I hope that you will be able to share your knowledge with others as you taught us. Please come back to our school. I love the lessons you have taught and hearing stories like this. That's why I'm asking you to come to our school to teach us more things.

Number	Feedback
08	I'm so happy that a group like you came to this school. Because for a long time, I didn't know that there were animals like this in the sea. Today you taught us that there are animals like this in the sea. They eat these things. They are very threatened in the sea. We need to do these things to protect them. You taught us that they are very valuable to us. I will protect the sea from today. Thank you very much for teaching us these things. Today, I learned many things that I didn't know because of you. I wish you success in your work.
09	We learned many things we didn't know through this program. Let's all follow the lessons taught to us by the Oceanswell program and protect marine life. In the Oceanswell program, everything was explained in an understandable way. The Oceanswell program showed and explained pictures of animals and different animals that had not been seen before.
10	I learned about sea mammals today. I learned more about seabirds. I also learned more about turtles. I also learned about dugongs. I learned about their ecological importance. Next time, explain in a short video. I would now like to learn more about marine mammals, seabirds, turtles, and dugongs. Thank you very much for teaching us about marine mammals, seabirds, and turtles. I love you so much. Do you know why? Because you love sea creatures.
11	I didn't really know about seabirds, turtles, and mammals. Today I learned a lot about the sea from this program. If I ever go to the sea again, I'll look at all the things those aunts and uncles told me. I'm asking those aunts and uncles to come to our school again and show a program like that again. I'm waiting for you to come again.

Figure 8. Key moments captured during the community workshop presentation in Kalpitiya: a) Students completing the pre-test, b–d) Presenters conducting the outreach program sessions, e) Students engaging during the presentations, and f) Students completing the post-test.

5.1.2 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The results of the pre-test and post-test are shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among students showing improved performance before and after the workshop.

As shown in Figure 9, pre-test scores are largely concentrated between 3 and 8 marks, whereas post-test scores are distributed at higher values, mostly between 8 and 13 marks. The distribution of scores (ranging from 1 to 15) for both tests. The mean pre-test score was 7.0 ± 1.9, while the mean post-test score increased to 10.9 ± 2.2, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the results demonstrate a positive learning outcome and highlight the effectiveness of the community awareness workshop in improving participants' understanding of marine species and conservation topics.

5.1.3 Workshop 5 – Dickwella – Matara District

Date: 24 October 2025

Time: 09:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Venue : MR/Thalalla South Maha Vidyalaya

Target Audience: School Students – Grade 8 and 9

5.1.3.1 Summary

The workshop was attended by 49 students (33 girls and 16 boys, aged 13–14), along with the deputy principal and five teachers. The school, located near the beach, had many students from

fishing families who participated enthusiastically, sharing their personal experiences with marine species (Figure 10). While most were familiar with marine mammals and sea turtles, their knowledge of seabirds was limited. To assess learning progress, pre- and post-tests with 15 multiple-choice questions (15 minutes each) were conducted, and some student feedback is transcribed in Table 8.

Table 8. Transcribed Feedback from the Dickwella School Workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	I actually learned a lot from this program today. We don't know these things even though we live near this sea. This program was really well done. I understood it well. I learned about these ocean creatures today. From this program, I realised how important the sea is to us. I hope to make such a beautiful program.
02	I actually learned a lot about the ocean, which I have loved since I was a child. I don't know much about them. But I learned a lot from this program. My future hope is to work hard to provide protection to animals like this. My future career is to be a veterinarian. So, I hope you can continue to do these programs.
03	I learned a lot from your program. Your program was also beautiful. It was very organised. You taught us well, and we understood a lot. We also got to know things we didn't know. Thank you very much.
04	We didn't know much about the coastal environment. You taught us many things today that we didn't know. In an understandable way. You gave us examples of how to quickly get into our minds. We learned about seabirds and many animals in the sea that we didn't know. By doing programs like this, we can learn things we don't know. I wish you all the strength and encouragement to do programs like this. Thank you.
05	Through this program, we learned a lot of things we didn't know. Also, through this program, we learned a lot of details about sea creatures and sea birds that we didn't know. We also learned about many special events related to the sea that we didn't know.
06	We gained many ideas and facts from this program, such as the importance of marine life, what can be done to protect marine life, the harm humans are causing to these animals, and what can be done to prevent them. This program enabled us to learn many things we didn't know before.
07	I really learned a lot through this program. I gained a good understanding of marine life. And you all did a great job organising this program. I learned a lot of things which I didn't know about marine life through this program. I would like to learn more through another program like this. I also gained a better understanding of the endangered species through this program.
08	We learned a lot from this program. We didn't know a lot about marine life. Thank you very much for explaining it so clearly. Actually, before we came to this program, I thought this was a very boring program. But it's not like that. I was eagerly looking forward to this program. Thank you very much, brothers and sisters.
09	We learned everything we didn't know about the ocean today, and we learned a lot about seabirds and turtles. And we understood what they said very well. And it was a good education for our lives. We also learned a lot about the benefits of these animals for us. Thank you all for coming to this school for us and providing this valuable awareness.
10	We understood your program very well. The way you all presented the program was also beautiful. You taught us to understand it well. I got a lot of wrong answers in the previous paper. I think we answered the second paper correctly because you taught us beautifully and with understanding.

Number	Feedback
11	We were able to learn many things about previously unknown ocean creatures, including their characteristics, diet, behaviour, threats to them, and steps that can be taken to protect them. Today we learned a lot about marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds, where they lay their eggs, how to protect them and release them into the environment, and how to protect their young before they die. We learned a lot about marine animals that we didn't know about. I have learned a lot about these issues today. Thank you very much to all of you who have informed me about them.

Figure 10. Key moments from the school workshop in Dickwella: (a) Deputy Principal welcoming the team and introducing the outreach program to the students; (b) Participants completing the pre-test before the presentations began; (c–d) Presenters engaging with students during the outreach sessions; (e) A student delivering a speech to share her feedback and express thanks; and (f) Handover of comic books and a poster to the school library.

5.1.3.2 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The results of the pre-test and post-test conducted before and after the workshop are shown in Figure 11.

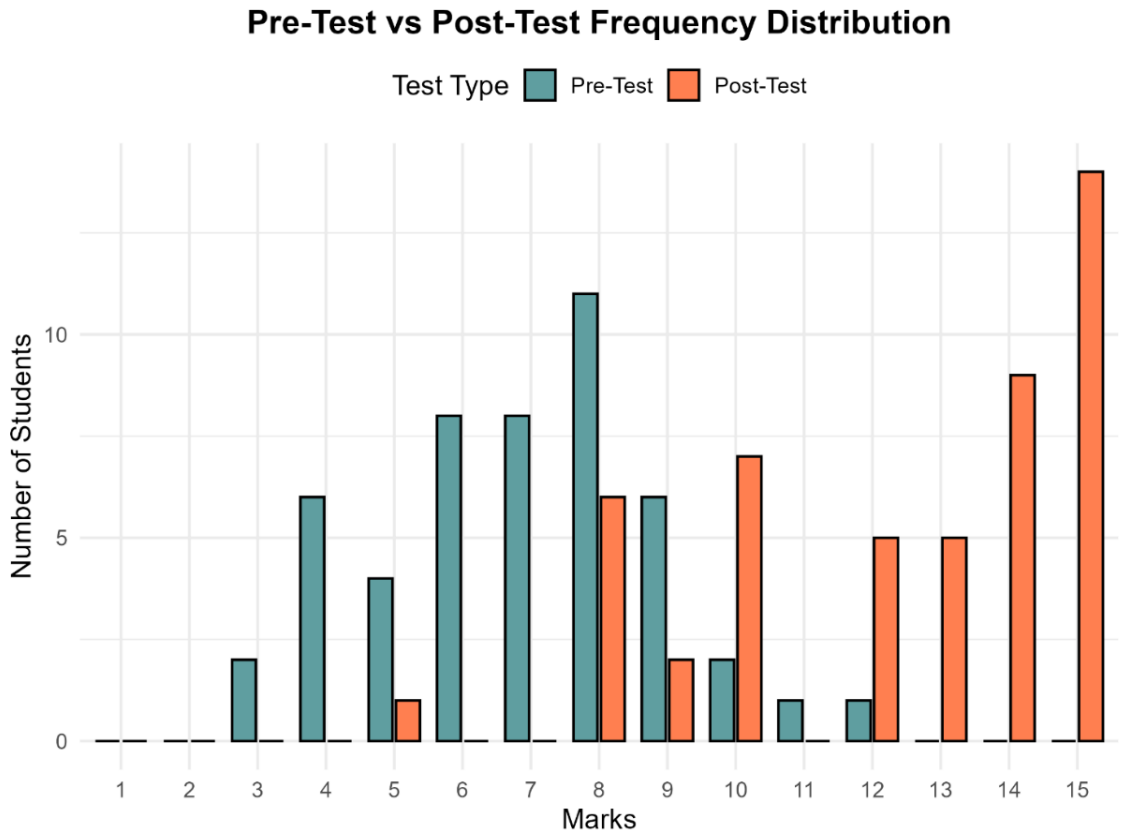

Figure 11. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among Students showing improved performance before and after the workshop.

As shown in Figure 7, pre-test scores were mostly concentrated between 3 and 9 marks, showing that students had a basic understanding of the topics before the workshop. Post-test scores shifted higher, with most students scoring between 10 and 15 marks, and a large number achieving full marks (15). This shift clearly demonstrates improved knowledge and understanding after the session.

The scores ranged from 1 to 15 for both the pre-test and post-test. The average pre-test score was 6.9 ± 2.0, which increased to 12.3 ± 2.7 in the post-test, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the results indicate that the workshop effectively enhanced students' awareness and learning about marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds.

5.1.4 Workshop 6 – Panama – Ampara District

Date: 27 October 2025

Time: 09:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Venue : Am/Panama Maha Vidyalaya

Target Audience: School Students – Grade 8 and 9

5.1.4.1 Summary

The workshop was attended by 81 students (27 girls and 54 boys, aged 13–14), along with teachers who supported the session. Many of the students came from fishing families living near the beach and participated enthusiastically, sharing personal experiences with marine species (Figure 12). While most were familiar with sea turtles, their knowledge of marine mammals and seabirds was limited. Some students admitted that they had knowingly or unknowingly eaten sea turtle eggs in the past, but they promised to protect them from now on. To assess learning progress, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted among the students, too. Some student feedback is transcribed in Table 9.

Table 9. Transcribed Feedback from the Panama School Workshop.

Number	Feedback
01	The program is good. It would be nice if it had a few better pictures. Everything else is good. We were very happy with the level of details. Thank you very much, Oceanswell.
02	You taught us many things that we didn't know. We sincerely thank you for coming all the way, spending on travel, to teach us things we did not know. We hope that this program will continue to improve. Thank you.
03	I didn't think we would have a program like this at our school. Thank you all very much. Thank you very much for sharing the stories with us and adding some facts to our knowledge by explaining the reasons behind the stories. I hope that programs like this will continue.
04	We learned a lot from this program. We now understand the importance of marine animals and their protection. From today, we will protect them without disturbing them. Thank you to all of you who made this program possible.
05	This program is really good. We learned a lot of things we didn't know because of this program. In fact, there was a big difference in the answers to the second question paper compared to the answers to the questions given before the program started. Because we learned a lot from this. We are very happy. We need to find the strength to continue programs like this.
06	We learned a lot about the animals that live in the sea and on the coast through this program. I think what we learned will be very helpful in answering questions that we will ask in the future. I think some of the things we were taught were probably not even known by our mothers and fathers. Thank you very much to those aunts and uncles who taught us about these unknown mammals, turtles, and seabirds. I hope that you, who have dedicated yourself to us and are serving society, will have more opportunities to organise better programs in the future.
07	This program, done by Oceanswell, is very good. Thank you very much to the sisters and brothers who came to do this program. Also, thank you very much to the principal who organised this program for us. I hope Oceanswell can do this program in more schools as well. Thank you.
08	We are grateful for coming to our school and organising such a program. We did not know anything like this before. Today we learned many things about the sea that we did not know. Our village is surrounded by the sea, so we need to know about the sea. This is something that is very important to the uncles in our village who go to the sea. Thank you for coming from a long distance.
09	It was a really good program. The sisters and brothers who were conducting the program interacted with us in a friendly manner, so we understood the program well. I request you to provide this kind of knowledge to our sisters and brothers as well. Thank you to everyone involved in this program.

Number	Feedback
10	I really like this program. I have never seen anything like this. Your program is very good. I really like this program. I wish I could do more programs like this. I hope you can do programs like this. Thank you very much for showing us this program.
11	We learned a lot of things we didn't know from this program. This program is for our science lesson. What this said is important for that lesson. I would like to do another program like this program. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this program.

Figure 12. Key moments from the school workshop in Panama: (a) Participants completing the pre-test before the presentations began; (b–d) Presenters engaging with students during the outreach sessions; (e) A student delivering a speech to share her feedback and express appreciation; and (f) Handing over comic books and a poster to the school library.

5.1.4.2 Statistical Summary of the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The results of the pre-test and post-test are presented in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Comparison of pre-test and post-test frequency distribution among Students showing improved performance before and after the workshop.

In the pre-test, most students scored between 8 and 10 marks, while only a few reached higher scores above 12. In contrast, the post-test results show a clear improvement, with the majority of students scoring between 12 and 15 marks, and a noticeable peak at 14 marks.

The scores ranged from 1 to 15 for both the pre-test and post-test. The average pre-test score was 9.4 ± 1.8, which increased to 12.7 ± 2.1 in the post-test, indicating a statistically significant improvement in participant knowledge after the session.

Overall, the results indicate that the workshop effectively enhanced students' awareness and learning about marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds.

6 Discussion

The workshops were conducted in three coastal regions (Kalpitya, Dickwella and Panama), engaging both community members and school children to raise awareness about PET marine species, including marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds.

Conducting the workshops in these three locations allowed engagement of fishers whose daily activities closely interact with marine life, making them crucial stakeholders in marine conservation. It also provided an opportunity to raise awareness among individuals involved in tourism-related activities such as whale watching and swimming with whales, emphasising the importance of protecting PET species to sustain both the fishing industry and eco-tourism in the region.

In all locations, knowledge of the current protection of PET species varied even when communities were near to protected areas or involved in environmental tourism. Conducting workshops in the three locations provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the legal protection of PET species, discouraging harmful practices, and strengthen local participation in conservation activities.

The team adjusted each session to suit the audience and ensure the message was effectively communicated. This approach helped both groups clearly relate to the topics and understand their importance in different contexts.

For the school workshops, the presentation was delivered simply and engagingly so that students could easily understand. To actively engage with students during the sea turtle section, used a soft toy turtle as a visual aid, which the students found very interesting. The team used stories, visuals, and interactive discussions to make the learning experience more enjoyable and to improve students' awareness of marine life and conservation.

During the community workshops, the approach was more practical and connected to the participants' daily lives. The discussions were linked to their fishing activities, emphasising how marine conservation and sustainable practices directly support their livelihoods.

Participants showed great enthusiasm, eagerly asking questions and sharing their experiences. Their feedback and reflections provided valuable insights into their understanding of local marine biodiversity and conservation, such as the need to address research on dugongs and humpback dolphins. Through these discussions, the team also gained important insights into current issues affecting each region. In the southern coastal areas, participants believed that unregulated whale-watching activities and increased human interactions are contributing to disturbances in dolphin populations. In Panama, community members noted that sea turtle egg poaching still occurs despite conservation efforts, indicating the need for stronger awareness and enforcement measures. These conversations helped the team better understand the local challenges and the importance of community involvement in protecting marine species.

One of the challenges encountered during the workshops was that some fishermen were unable to read the pre-test and post-test questions. To address this, a team member read the questions aloud to them. Since they were also unable to write their names and feedback on paper, their responses were carefully noted down by a team member, ensuring that all participants could effectively take part in the evaluation process.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

The workshops effectively increased awareness and knowledge of PET marine species among both school children and local coastal communities. The pre-test provided an initial evaluation of knowledge, while the post-test results showed an improvement, demonstrating the effectiveness of the workshops in enhancing understanding of marine biodiversity. Students actively participated, asked questions, and shared their experiences, while community members, including fishermen, women in fisheries, divers, tour guides, and fishery harbour workers, contributed valuable insights, discussed local challenges, and suggested areas for future research.

Overall, the workshops successfully facilitated knowledge exchange, strengthened community engagement in marine conservation, and highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts to protect and sustainably manage coastal and marine ecosystems.

Based on feedback from participants, several key recommendations were identified to enhance marine species conservation and awareness, as summarised in Table 10.

Table 10. Workshop recommendations and practical approaches for marine species conservation.

Recommendation	How could this be achieved
Conduct further research on marine species, particularly in areas with extensive seagrass beds from Kalpitiya to Mannar.	Collaborate with research institutions to carry out targeted field studies and surveys in seagrass habitats.
Organise more workshops and educational programs for students.	Schedule regular workshops in coastal schools and communities, ensuring participation from local children.
Protect humpback dolphins to enable research.	Implement conservation measures and legal protections; engage local communities in monitoring and reporting.
Incorporate multimedia, such as short videos, in workshops.	Develop educational materials, including videos and animations, to improve understanding and engagement.
Expand the program to include all fishermen.	Conduct awareness and training sessions for fishermen across different coastal regions to ensure wide participation and knowledge sharing.
Consider fishermen's opinions when developing regulations.	Engage fishermen in decision-making processes and incorporate their traditional knowledge and experiences into marine management plans.