



## Shushuk Mela 2013

Sharing the challenge of conserving cetaceans  
with local communities







A traditional palm leaf collecting boat was modified into a platform for the floating Dolphin Festival or Shushuk Mela.







Student volunteers, crew members and artists assisted the BCDP Educational Outreach Team with the final preparations.





On February 8<sup>th</sup> 2013 the Khulna Circle Conservator of Forest inaugurated the 4th Shushuk Mela. 7 senior staffs from Forest Department, NGOs and media partners were present for the opening ceremony.







The Shushuk Mela 2013 was open to the public for 24 days.





The goal of this interactive exhibition featuring the amazing cetacean diversity and abundance of Bangladesh is to encourage the engagement of local communities in cetacean conservation efforts. The exhibition offers a platform to discuss sustainable fisheries, impacts of environmental changes caused by reduced freshwater inflow and sea-level rise, alternative income generating activities, benefits and value of a healthy biodiversity, and proposed conservation actions.





The Key Messages for the Shushuk Mela 2013 were:

- Dolphins are our pride and need protection
- Fishermen should attend their nets and safely release dolphins that become entangled
- Measures taken to protect dolphins can improve fisheries.





The Shushuk Mela 2013 anchored at 15 locations, identified as places of origin for fisher folk active in the new wildlife sanctuaries.





The exhibition was structured into three sections according to the key messages. The exhibits included informative panels, interactive games, a bio-scope showing the live birth of a dolphin, life-size models of dolphins and a show case with handicrafts made from locally available materials.





At every location the festival was publicly announced and schools were visited to encourage the participation of all community members.





A team of interpreters visited a total of 62 schools, madrassas and colleges to extend an open invitation to all students and teachers for visiting the exhibition.





In every classroom the team conducted an introductory session during which they introduced the dolphin festival and invited students to share their ideas for protecting and saving the freshwater dolphins of Bangladesh.





Thanks to the cooperation of teachers and education administrators, students from about 55 schools, madrassas and colleges were able to visit the exhibition.





More than 13'000 people visited the Shushuk Mela 2013, on an average about 500 visitors a day. Among them 74.1% were children, 18.5% were middle aged and 8.1% were above 40 years of age.





Due to country-wide politically motivated unrests, community member of several places refrained from visiting the Shushuk Mela.





All children received a dolphin cap promoting the BCDP Dolphin Hotline number.  
The newly added photo-wall attracted young and older visitors alike.





On 15 evenings two documentaries about the freshwater dolphins and ongoing conservation research were seen by a total of 4463 people.





Visitors were guided through the exhibition by a team of WCS staff and trained interpreters.





A total of 1278 groups with 10 to 15 people were guided. Where possible, groups were separated by age classes.







The interpreters and crew members shared all logistical responsibilities of running the exhibition. In some places local people volunteered to assist the team.







### ***Concept***

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### ***Design***

Farhana Akhtar  
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### ***Construction***

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### ***Dolphin Models***

SM Asif Mahbub

### ***Interpretation***

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Saikat, Farhana,  
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### ***Photographs***

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