

Dugong Festival 2014 on Phu Quoc Island

Phu Quoc Island, dated 30th November 2014 – This morning, over 800 people including local leaders, teachers, students, public and tourists participated in the Dugong Festival 2014 at Phu Quoc Cultural House, Duong Dong Town, Phu Quoc Island. The festival aims to raise awareness and gain the attention of leaders, students and teachers, locals and tourists for the protection of Dugong and endangered marine creatures. The festival was organised by Wildlife At Risk (WAR), Phu Quoc Marine Protected Area and Phu Quoc District Department of Education and Training included two main activities: a parade and a play contest. The main message of the festival is to “Take part in saving Dugong and endangered marine creatures”.

Of the over 800 participants of the festival, roughly 300 children aged 12-15 years old are from six Marine Conservation Clubs of six secondary schools on Phu Quoc Island. The parade started at Phu Quoc Cultural House going through the town and passed by the Dinh Cau Temple – a famous tourist spot on Phu Quoc Island and finished back at the Cultural House. The parade was a successful and exciting event supported by the participation of locals and tourists alike.

After the parade, all participants enjoyed a play contest inside the Phu Quoc Cultural House. The best plays by six of the Marine Conservation Clubs were performed during the contest. All of the plays were about conservation of Dugong and endangered marine creatures. Each play was carefully developed and well prepared by different clubs’ members. Key message regarding conservation of the Dugong and other endangered marine creatures was clearly conveyed to the audience through the intelligent and enthusiastic children and their bright vision about the future for marine life. The audience was profoundly affected by the play and inspired to take action to help Dugong protection.

First prize was awarded to the play entitled Dugong Diary developed and performed by Nang Tien Ca Club, Duong Dong 1 Secondary School. The play is about a journey of a mother and a baby Dugong from beautiful days to dark days when the two Dugongs faced numerous threats such as heading a board, eating nylon bags floating on sea grasses, being poured by dirty water... Peak of the play is a tragedy when the mother Dugong was caught by two fishermen. Although, the play has a happy ending which the mother Dugong is released back to the sea and she is reunited with her baby Dugong again, the play makes the audiences worry for Dugong’s fate in reality and inspires them to do something for Dugong.

Other plays were also awarded with one second, one third and threes runner up prizes. The plays will be performed to other audiences on other occasions and will be shared broadly in the future.

At the festival, songs and dances were also performed by the six secondary schools. All participants also show their commitment to Dugong conservation by pledging on saving Dugong on a big Dugong display.

“The festival was strongly supported through participation by leaders from different bodies, students, teachers and the public. Through this event we expect that Dugong enforcement activities will be strengthened and everyone will take action towards conservation of the Dugong and other endangered marine creatures”, said Mr. Nguyen Vu Khoi, WAR’s CEO.



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Additional information

About WAR

Wildlife At Risk (WAR) is dedicated to protecting the biodiversity of Vietnam by combating illegal wildlife trade and promoting the conservation of endangered species and their habitats. Founded in 2003 in Vietnam, WAR focuses on working in three areas including (1) Enforcement Programmes, (2) Conservation Programmes and (3) Wildlife Education Programmes.

About Dugong

Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is a large marine mammal species. An adult Dugong is about 3 metres long and can weigh 450 kilograms. They feed on sea grass and other marine plants. Due to their slow movements and large body, Dugongs can easily get stuck in fishing nets and many drown. This species is also intensively hunted not only for food but also for traditional medicine and jewelry.

Dugongs are classified as critically endangered in the Vietnam Red Book and listed as a vulnerable species in the IUCN Red Book. According to WWF, in 2003, Phu Quoc and Con Dao are the only two marine places in Vietnam that have Dugongs, with an estimated total of no more than 100.

About the Dugong Trade Situation on Phu Quoc Island

An illegal trade network of dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) on Phu Quoc Island was detected by Wildlife At Risk (WAR) in September 2012. These illegal trading activities also included other endangered marine wildlife. WAR's investigation also revealed that this illegal trading network of dugong parts used to work quite openly. Since dugong and marine resource conservation activities have started, this trading network has been operating more secretly.

Soon after the discovery, WAR officially requested the authorities on Phu Quoc Island to confiscate this illegal trading network of dugongs and other endangered marine wildlife. Positive response from local authorities regarding this case encouraged WAR to conduct conservation activities of Phu Quoc Marine resources.

Marine Conservation Clubs

In the last academic year 2013-2014, six Marine Conservation Clubs were set up by six secondary schools and are still being operated during this academic year 2014-2015. Each club includes 40-50 children aged 12-15 years old and are managed by two trained teachers. The club often meets once or twice per month. Each meeting includes exciting games, photography and practical activities to help students to learn about the Dugong and the marine environment in a relaxed atmosphere. Drama performance is one of the main activities of each club this year.