

**February 2024**

**Outreach and Awareness:**

**Interview surveys and Community interaction with the Fisher community**

Between the 14<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2024 interview surveys were conducted at Bet Dwarka and Arambhada village with fishermen. This Survey and Community interaction involved approximately 54 fishers. The surveys were designed to inform about the Go-Slow zones for fishers in the core Dugong areas, and for current/historical Dugong sightings. Winter fishing areas, techniques, and catch were discussed most fishers now avoid fishing in the Dugong core areas from the fear of GJFD. They were well aware of Seagrass meadows but had not sighted any Dugong near Okhari area where they fish. Okhari is outside the core Dugong area. New distributional record of *Halophila beccarri* from Bet Dwarka island was reported by a fishermen community. Throughout all programs and one-to-one interview surveys, Go-Slow zones near channels, regions to avoid anchoring in meadows, tidal awareness and habitat use of Dugongs was informed.



*Figure 1. Glimpse of Interview surveys and Community interaction with the Fisher community*

## **Participated in Dolphin Census 2024**

On 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2024 the Gujarat Forest Department conducted a three-day Dolphin Census and WII research team participated as a technical person and helped to collect information.



*Figure 2. A glimpse of Dolphin Census 2024 with Gujarat Forest Department*

## **March 2024**

### **Community interaction and Awareness program with Fishermen Community at Salaya village**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024, an awareness program was conducted in the central region of the Gulf, at Salaya village. Seagrass habitats and Go-Slow zones in/around Dugong habitats were discussed. Most fishers claim to have seen seagrasses in the surrounding islands/reefs. Occurrence locations of seagrasses and dugong sightings were noted. Most Fisher houses were demolished due to a development project in the area. Therefore, an intensive effort to interview fishers was halted for a time.

### **Awareness program with fishermen community at Sikka village**

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2024, in collaboration with the presidents and vice presidents of the fisheries and boat association of Sikka village, an awareness program for Dugongs and their habitats around their fishing areas was done. Most fishers and president expressed their concern regarding the loss in the fish stock and extinction of commercially valuable fisher in the industrial area of Sikka-Salaya of the Gulf of Kutch.



Figure 3. Glimpse of interaction with fishers

## April 2024

### Awareness program with DKV College Students and Staff

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, an elaborate talk was given to the students regarding the insular/coastal habitats of Dugongs in the Gulf of Kutch. The effects of wastewater discharge, and microplastics as pollutants were discussed. Methods used for mapping Seagrasses and Dugong habitats were also discussed. The students pledged their role in the conservation and awareness of Dugongs and their habitats and further expressed participation during Dugong Day events.



Figure 4. Glimpse of Awareness program with DKV College Students



**May 2024**

**Community interaction and Awareness program with the fishermen community at Salaya village**

On 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024, a special community interaction awareness program with Salaya town's fisheries association presidents and boat heads was organized on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024. Ecological services and life histories of Dugong and their forage were discussed. Ecological roles of Seagrasses and go-slow areas near the community's fishing ground were communicated. The members of the community took a special interest in the Seagrass herbariums, pointing to the parallels in the life history of Seagrasses and some commercially valuable fishes.



*Figure 5. Glimpse of Community Interaction and Awareness program with the fishermen community at Salaya village*

**Awareness program for celebrating Dugong Day 2024 at Sundarvan MiniZoo, Ahmedabad**

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Gujarat Dugong team, in collaboration with Sundarvan MiniZoo, a well-known centre for environmental education in Ahmedabad, conducted an informative awareness session as part of the upcoming World Dugong Day celebration. The event saw the participation of around 250 locals, including numerous children, who learned about the fascinating world of Dugongs, their threats, and the ongoing conservation efforts in the Gulf of Kutch. The awareness session raised awareness among residents about the importance of Dugongs and the need to protect them. The enthusiastic response to the selfie stand indicates a strong community interest and support for the cause. By educating the younger generation and fostering a sense of responsibility.



*Figure 6. Glimpse of Interaction with locals, students, & kids for World Dugong Day 2024*

### **Talk on World Ocean Day 2024 at RSC Bhavnagar**

On World Ocean Day, 8th June 2024, the WII CAMPA Gujarat team, in collaboration with the Kshitij Foundation and the Regional Science Centre (RSC), Bhavnagar, organized an impactful mass awareness program at RSC, Bhavnagar. The event was graced by the presence of the esteemed Director of RSC, Dr. Girish Goswami, and Dr. Payal Pandit, Curator. The awareness program successfully targeted school and college students, as well as RSC visitors, drawing a total of 200 participants. The event focused on highlighting the critical importance of our oceans, marine ecosystems, dugongs, and seagrass conservation while promoting ongoing conservation efforts in Gujarat and India. The awareness program was followed by a quiz competition that engaged and educated the participants further. Souvenir kits were distributed to all participants. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Deven Mehta, RSC Bhavnagar staff, and local volunteers Amir Matali, Karan Thakar, Gopal Ram, Pankaj, Sanjay, Nitin, Prakash, Shital Makwana, Pratik, Vivek, Kajal Vadiya Himanshu Boricha, who ensured the smooth management of the event.



Figure 7. Talk on World Ocean Day 2024 at RSC Bhavnagar

### Webinar on World Ocean Day 2024 in collaboration with Wildlife Trust of India

On the occasion of World Ocean Day conducted an Online webinar with Farukhkhya Bloch from the Wildlife Trust of India. This seminar will bring together researchers and college students to discuss the "Importance of Community in the Conservation of Marine Megafauna, Especially Whale Sharks." Discover how community engagement plays a crucial role in protecting these majestic creatures and preserving marine ecosystems.



Figure 8. Glimpse of the webinar on World Ocean Day 2024



## Webinar with Ocean Ally Foundation

Online webinar conducted by the Ocean Ally Foundation on June 24, 2024. Featuring renowned researchers and WWF staff, the session will delve into 'Mermaids of the Sea: Conservation Initiatives in India and Gujarat.' Discover how these efforts benefit fishermen and the local community by highlighting the critical importance of the seagrass ecosystem. Learn why conserving these habitats is essential for both marine life and human livelihoods. Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights into marine conservation.

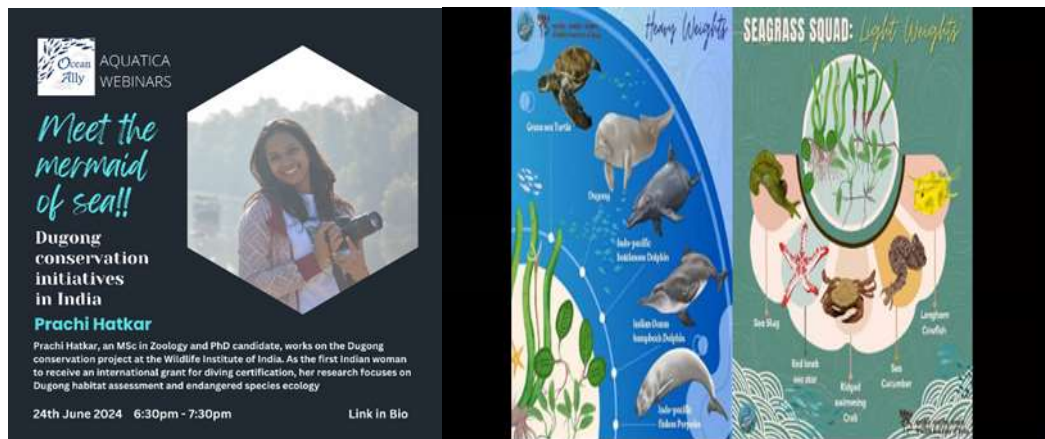


Figure 9.A glimpse of the webinar on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024