

15 May 2011: The 9th International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise

On Sunday, 15 May 2011 was the ninth annual 'International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise'. As in previous years, this occasion was commemorated with a variety of events around the Baltic Sea.

Denmark

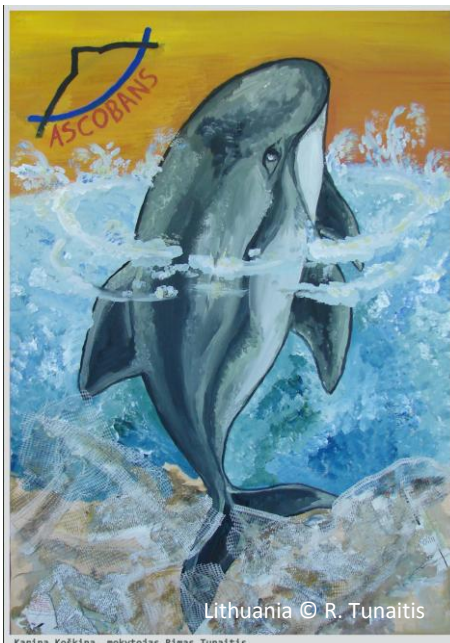
The [Fjord&Bælt](#) in Kerteminde on this day allowed free entrance for all locals. Over 400 visitors joined the celebration, a much higher number than on a normal Sunday in mid May. The chief scientist, Magnus Wahlberg, gave two lectures, each attended by about 20 people. They focused on the biology of porpoises as well as the research conducted both on the harbour porpoises in captivity at the centre and on what is done in e.g. the SAMBAH and similar projects to help the Baltic porpoise. Visitors also had the chance to sample porpoise-shaped biscuits, made especially for the occasion by a local bakery, which were distributed for free.

Finland

The [Särkänniemi dolphinarium](#) in Tampere prepared some activities for visitors, with a special focus on small children. An orienteering competition was devised, where the participants had to find clues in the park in order to get the final result. Visitors were offered information material on the harbour porpoise, the SAMBAH project and the sighting campaign directed by the Finnish Ministry of Environment, which is supported by Särkänniemi.

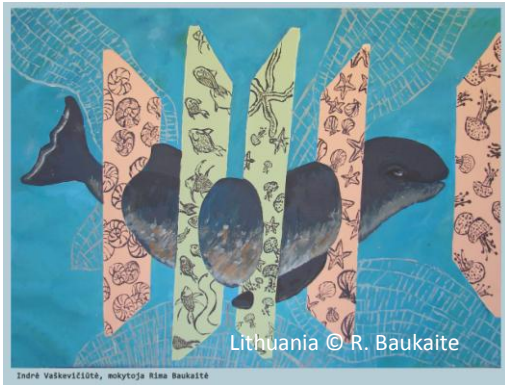


Lithuania



The [Lithuanian Sea Museum](#) is a regular participant in the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. Each year, a different event is planned to educate visitors about these animals in an interesting, attractive way. This year science and art were presented in harmony. Children attending the art school Adomas Brakas in Klaipėda attended educational programmes on the ecology of the Baltic Sea and harbour porpoises. After this event, they had two weeks to paint pictures on the subject. Some examples of the many stunning pieces of art are shown here.

They were displayed in an exhibition at the Lithuanian Sea Museum which opened on 13 May and attracted many visitors. The pictures were displayed for two weeks and information material was also provided to visitors. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied by the string band of the Klaipėda music school of Jeronimas Kačinskis, thus adding another type of art to the event.



Poland



On Sunday, 15 May employees of the [Hel Marine Station](#) (Institute of Oceanography, Gdansk University) celebrated the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise on Kosciuszko Square in Gdynia, where both residents and visitors were informed about the least-known marine mammal living in the Baltic Sea.

The Marine Station staff presented education and information materials, together with a whole range of interesting exhibits, such as a cod pod. This alternative type of fishing gear allows the cod to be caught without threatening marine mammals, which means that the problem of bycatch of porpoises is eliminated.



For the youngest fans of porpoises a booklet on the Baltic mammals was prepared and made available along with postcards, stickers and balloons filled with helium. The balloons carried a logo with the image of a porpoise and the slogan "Save the Baltic Porpoises". Even though the event took place on a cold and rainy day, several hundred balloons were distributed. In addition, children could take part in activities such as games, catching fish, learning to make sailor's knots, receiving facial paintings of porpoises or commemorative photos.



Germany

Duisburg

This year [Duisburg Zoo](#) participated for the first time in the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise to make people aware of one of the most endangered species in the waters of our German coast. Not all people know about these precious creatures and some are not even aware that there are cetaceans in Germany.

In contrast with its small size, the Zoo let the harbour porpoise “act big” for a day – and enlarged it to blue whale size! The artist Jörg Mazur drew a harbour porpoise, which with the help of a raster was then expanded to the enormous size of 33.6 metres. The paint was donated by the manufacturer and about 100 fifth graders of the Erich-Kästner-Gesamtschule in Duisburg spent four days painting the giant porpoise on the floor outside of the Zoo’s dolphinarium. In order to get a good picture of the entire painting, the Duisburg fire brigade came with a huge ladder.



The painting was presented to the public on Saturday, 28 May. Every child that had taken part in the painting of the blue whale-sized porpoise as well as every child that painted a porpoise of its own or coloured a drawing provided by the zoo was granted free admittance to the zoo for themselves and their parents.

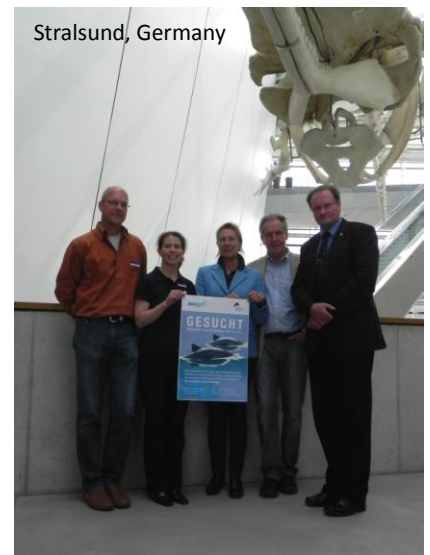


In addition, many were invited to celebrate the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise with the Zoo. SOS Dolfijn from Dolphinarium Harderwijk in the Netherlands informed visitors about their harbour porpoise rehabilitation project and brought a model porpoise, a stretcher and a lot of informative material. The German Society for Dolphin Conservation informed about their porpoise sightings in the river Weser, and Greenpeace supported the day by highlighting many examples of active conservation in our oceans.

Stralsund

The NGO “[Gesellschaft zum Schutz der Meeressäuger](#)” (GSM - Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals) issued a press release which highlighted the precarious conservation status of the Baltic harbour porpoise, which since 2008 has been classified as “critically endangered” on the IUCN Red List. A potentially dramatic decline is also being observed in the western Baltic and Danish Belt Sea area. The main cause of mortality is bycatch – unwanted catch in fishing gear.

One prerequisite for effective conservation measures is knowledge of the preferred habitats of the species. A sightings programme, coordinated since 2002 by GSM, was handed over to the [German Oceanographic Museum](#) on the occasion of the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. Everyone, locals and visitors to the Baltic Sea alike, can report online, by telephone or post sightings of live porpoises at sea and of stranded specimens. This data is then compiled and displayed on a map to allow a better understanding of the distribution and density of porpoise populations in different parts of the Baltic Sea.



Düsseldorf

The [Aquazoo/Löbbecke Museum](#) honoured the special day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise on 15 May with an exhibition, information stand and games for children in front of the skeleton of a sperm whale in the lobby of the building. Besides distributing brochures about the harbour porpoise and other marine life in the Baltic Sea, a magnet game allowed adults and children alike to familiarize themselves with the different species of



Düsseldorf © R. Kränzlein

porpoise and their distribution. Older children were especially keen on a crossword puzzle, which covered topics such as the anatomy and taxonomy of porpoises and the threats they face. Children completing either of the games would win a copy of the ASCOBANS poster “Is something missing here?” or a porpoise badge produced by IFAW.

The ASCOBANS exhibition in German was especially interesting for adult visitors and was complemented by an information stand illustrating the



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difference between toothed and baleen whales with a dolphin skull, sperm whale tooth and a piece of baleen, which could all be touched by visitors.

Many of the 2,000 visitors to the Aquazoo on that day showed great interest in the event – and several had not realized before that there was a cetacean species native to German waters. Others had already seen harbour porpoises in the wild, e.g. near the island of Sylt in the North Sea. Many were aggrieved to learn of the critical status of the Baltic harbour porpoise and were interested to learn what they could do to help its conservation.

Baltic Tour

This year the ASCOBANS Secretariat celebrated the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise with a trip to the Baltic Sea to give guest lectures at three German universities, in Greifswald, Rostock and Kiel.



Greifswald © C. Kaltofen

The series started with a lecture at the Institute for Applied Zoology and Nature Conservation of the University of Greifswald on 11 May. After setting up the ASCOBANS exhibition with the team, consisting of the Coordinator Heidrun Frisch, the Assistant Bettina Reinartz and a former intern, Carola Kaltofen, who had prepared and organized this lecture series, Heidrun gave the first lecture in the beautiful old auditorium of the institute. The lecture covered background information on the biology of harbour porpoises, the distinctive Baltic population, conservation threats such as bycatch and underwater noise and how they are addressed, as well as an overview of the work of ASCOBANS.

In preparation of the lecture, the institute had placed a preserved specimen of a harbour porpoise on the table. Around 45 students listened to the English-language presentation about the threats to the small whale and many asked questions and joined in the discussion after the talk.

On 12 May the team went on to Rostock, again showing the exhibition and this time giving the lecture in German at the Institute for Biological Sciences of the University of Rostock. It was again well attended by 45 students who joined in a lively discussion afterwards.

The last destination of the journey was the IFM-Geomar of the University of Kiel, where on 13 May around 35 students attended the lecture and again many used the opportunity to ask questions.

All in all it was a very successful trip, during which more than 120 people listened to the information presented in these three days. The high level of interest in the harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea and the problems it faces was reflected by the lively discussions following the lectures and the high volumes of information material distributed.

