

## **Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) helps intellectually challenged children at Dhaka Zoo**

**Gawsia Chowdhury\***

An international event, *Dreamnight at the Zoo*, started its journey in 1996 designed by the Dreamnight at the Zoo Foundation, based at Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The Foundation has more than 150 partners in 30 countries of the world who celebrate this event annually. This programme is designed to take intellectually disabled persons including children, who are very special to us. People of northern hemisphere celebrate the event on the first Friday of June and in the southern hemisphere this event is celebrated on the first Friday of December. The goal of the programme is to make an annual and entrance-free day/evening of a zoo exclusively for intellectually disabled children, their parents and family members. Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh is a partner of this global initiative. Thus Bangladesh has joined this international initiative this year and this is the first programme of the Dreamnight at Dhaka zoo in Bangladesh on December 7.

This is an initiative to ensure that intellectually challenged persons have a direct role in conserving the biodiversity of the country. They could influence others by expressing their love for other life forms. The objective of the programme is to give the participants a good feeling towards the animals through games, songs, paintings and various other activities using hoolock and tiger as examples. The importance of these unique animals, their conservation and the importance of suitable habitats and the need to preserve forests are explained. The programme also aims to sparking the enthusiasm of disabled persons to inspire others.

A total of 105 guests including the 35 students of Sena Sahayok School of Dhaka Cantonment, their parents, family members, teachers, and staff participated in the programme. Another about 45 members of the Zoo and WTB crew and volunteers were there to assist the participants.

During this programme, the children were treated as VIPs and got a warm reception with flowers by the present and former Director Generals of the Directorate of Livestock, the curator and his colleagues of the zoo, and the members of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh. The children were allowed to draw their favourite animals, sing animal songs and dance. They were allowed to ask any questions related to animals. They told stories on animals, zoos and forests. The programme was designed to gift a special 'day of love for animals' to these very special people.

It was good to observe all the happy faces of the children, their parents and other family members. It was equally satisfying for the organizer if a conservation movement could be initiated in the

country through these intellectually challenged persons and their family members.

### **Dreamnight at the Zoo - theme and materials:**

The theme of the 'Dreamnight at the Zoo and Living World Around Us' was explained to all the participants. All the participants got a 'Dreamnight at the Zoo Gift Packet' with a Hoolock mask, a tiger mask, a clay bell (to raise alarm in favour of our dwindling biodiversity), a hoolock leaflet, and an animal friendship band, and a poster with their slogans, signatures and photographs to celebrate the first Dreamnight at the Zoo in Bangladesh and an attractive Poster 'Dreamnight at the Zoo - voice of intellectually challenged people' developed by the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh. The agenda was discussed briefly with the participants to make them understand the day's programme well and ready for the activity.

The objective of this activity is to attract the participants to the living world through a beautiful but threatened species, the Hoolock Gibbon. The Hoolocks are Endangered globally, but Critically Endangered in Bangladesh. To make the participants understand how Hoolock Gibbons are endangered in our forest conservation, an activity was arranged in front of Hoolock enclosure.

A Hoolock song has been developed by the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh where the singers express their love for Hoolocks. This activity was arranged in front of Hoolock enclosure. The hoolock gave loud calls when they were there. Students wore Hoolock mask The caption "Save Hoolock Gibbons, Save Forests, Protect Biodiversity" has been inscribed on the mask. The participants also held a placard where similar caption has been inscribed. Participants were requested to participate in a rally where they were carrying the banner of the Dreamnight at the Zoo foundation and the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh.

The next activity was to attract these children to the living world through one of the most charismatic and majestic species like tiger. This national animal of Bangladesh once occurred all over the country, but is now Critically Endangered and confined only in the Sundarbans (SW) mangrove forest (the largest mangrove forest in the world). The tiger started swimming when the participants were around the cage. All the participants were requested to wear the tiger mask and act like a tiger! The caption "Save Tigers, Save Sundarbans, Protect Biodiversity" has been inscribed on the mask. The participants were

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requested to come up with tiger tales/tiger songs/tiger rhymes to express their love for tigers.

**Beauty of the birds:** A photographic exhibition on birds by Enam Ul Haque, a member of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh were arranged for them at the auditorium of the Zoo. They were able to watch the birds of the Dhaka Zoo. An art competition entitled "our environment and our animal world" was arranged. Participants expressed their creative ideas through it.

Participants were requested to make fun through songs, rhymes and dances. Through these activities they expressed their love and affection for animals and the zoo.

WTB has developed a poster where all the intellectually challenged students appeal (by inscribing their signatures on it) to save the biodiversity. The slogan of the poster is

**VISIT ZOOS**

**TALK FOR HOOLOCK  
GIBBONS  
TALK FOR TIGERS  
WHO LOST THEIR VOICE**

**PROTECT FORESTS  
SAVE HOOLOCK GIBBONS  
SAVE TIGERS  
SAVE BIODIVERSITY**

At the end of the activity, the participants were requested to read their pledges loudly at the time of valedictory.

**Dreamnight at the Zoo - reflections from the parents:** WTB distributed a comment book to the parents: 'WTB-Dreamnight at the Zoo Book'. Parents and family members of the children expressed their good feelings about the programme. These will help and inspire the WTB crew to take future initiatives.

The Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh feels that Dreamnight at the Zoo should be declared as a national event and the zoo should be kept open for a day in a year for the intellectually and physically challenged persons.

**Wildlife Word Knits -- Try your hand**  
**Sanju Paul**

**ANIMALS** are

- A ----- All
- N ----- Nature's
- I ----- Innocent
- M ----- Magnificent
- A ----- And
- L ----- Lovable
- S ----- Species

**HUMANS** should be

- H ----- Happy
- U ----- Unswerving
- M ----- Mature
- A ----- And
- N ----- Nice

**FRIENDS OF ANIMALS!**

**WILD-LIFE**

- W ----- Wonderful
- I ----- Indispensable
- L ----- Lively
- D ----- Dwellers
- L ----- Living
- I ----- Inside
- F ----- Forests
- E ----- Ecosystem components

**VULTURES** in the Indian sub-continent

- V ----- Very
- U ----- Unfortunately
- L ----- Lessening
- T ----- Though
- U ----- Urgently
- R ----- Required
- S ----- Scavenger-species

**ENDANGERED** Species

- E ----- Earth
- N ----- Now
- D ----- Desperately
- A ----- Actually
- N ----- Needs
- G ----- Going
- E ----- Eloping
- R ----- Reducing
- E ----- Ending
- D ----- Dying SPECIES!

Let us do something to protect the ENDANGERED species!

**EXTINCT** speaks of the

- EX ----- Expiry of a species
- T ----- Trouble for the Ecosystem
- I ----- ill-management of the species
- N ----- Never- never- never
- C ----- Conquerable
- T ----- Trouncing of a species

Let us keep our aim distinct  
SAVE more and more species  
From getting **EXTINCT**.

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The children singing an animal song



A happy grandmother looks at his grandson with tiger mask and hoolock placard



Children dances wearing colourful dressess



Drawing animal pictures

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