

Danube Day 2014 in Bulgaria

Active for the rivers across northern Bulgaria

Like the river itself, Danube Day flowed across northern Bulgaria from Vidin in the west to Silistra in the east, energising thousands of people to get active for their rivers. This year's focus was education, engendering a sense of Danube pride, responsibility and international solidarity in all.

Events were held in every Danube municipality, and Sofia; led by councils, WWF, local NGOs and eco clubs in partnership with the Danube River Basin Directorate and Regional Environment and Water Inspectorates.

Vidin's Danube Bridge was a riot of white, green and red as 700 balloons were released to mark **Blue Danube Week**. With events in NE and NW Bulgaria and Serbia and Romania, the annual 3-country festival celebrated the Danube through music, art, theatre, folklore and sport. **Ruse** showcased Danube wines at the 'Blue & Wine' festival, offering the chance to sample varieties and meet makers. But such pleasures had to be earned: the day began with a 'Get active for the Danube' clean-up of Ruse quay. Evening brought relaxation and spectacle: hundreds of candle-lit lanterns floated-out across the river in the 'Blue & Light' festival. The event is run by Danube Competence Centre, working with local councils.

"The Danube is not just a river but a unique natural resource and connection between European countries!"

Slogan of a Danube Day youth workshop in Ruse.

Lom held a week of celebration with a clean-up challenge; foodfair; music festival and river rafting. Children from the Ecology and Environment Club showed impressive creativity at a photo exhibition in the town. Each photo portrayed an environmental issue in an innovative and eye-catching way.

The Danube Day message flowed through the skies and the rivers in **Kozloduy**, with kite flying, balloon release and fishing contests. In **Oriahovo**, nursery children had a great day putting birdboxes in riverside trees and drawing out this year's slogan in chalk outside their school.

Baikal's event in Dolna Mitropolia is always popular: free art materials and cloth bags; fascinating science presentation and sweets party brought smiles all round! **Nikopol's** day combined art with nature exhibitions. A cocktail party with a difference invited guests to sip frogs-legs Margaritas! Children giggled as adults turned away in horror, only to discover the 'legs' were actually sweets.

Spectacular night-time fire juggling on stilts, rock concert and much dancing led to a magical atmosphere on the Danube shores in **Persina Natural Park, Belene**. 1200 visitors soaked in the great atmosphere and sense of Danube solidarity. Huge 3m balls symbolizing the Earth bobbed around in the crowds accompanied by sound and visual effects. Earlier that day, infants enjoyed art workshops and goody-bags.

In **Svishtov**, children were inspired to paint the Danube landscape; while in **Tutrakan** they designed colourful T-shirts and held a kayaking regatta.

Further creativity was on show at **Sofia's** Metropolitan Zoo in a WWF sturgeon painting event to highlight the plight of endangered fish. WWF also announced the start of a major 7-year conservation programme to re-naturalise and restore river stretches and floodplains in 6 countries.

Other festivities include awarding of Bulgaria's **Danube Art Master** prize by the Centre for Environmental Information and Education (CEIE). Tsvetislava Kamenova and Maya Traycheva from Lom won with their sculpture predicting future earthlings made of plastic bottles! The national round is part of a 14-country ICPDR-GWP youth competition that invites children to express what their river means to them. To view the wealth of creativity inspired across the Basin, see Facebook and Flickr.

Danube Day Partners

Danube River Basin Directorate (DRBD) Pleven; municipality and village administrations and mayors of Vidin, Lom, Kozloduy, Oriahovo, Dolna Mitropolia, Baikal, Nikopol, Belene, Svishtov, Ruse and Tutrakan; Persina Natural Park; DRBD and Regional Environment and Water Inspectorates of Montana, Vratsa, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo and Ruse; Centre for Environmental Information and Education (CEIE); WWF; local NGOs; Eco clubs (including the Lom Ecology and Environment Club and Baikal Eco Club); Cultural Centres; *Probuda 1925 in Baikal*; Progress 1871 in Nikopol; Danube Competence Centre; local schools and kindergartens.

Danube Day 2014: Get active for a living Danube!

For general information about the 14-country Danube Day celebrations, view www.danubeday.org or email the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR): benedikt.mandl@unvienna.org.