

# 2023 Women of Discovery

The WINGS Women of Discovery Awards were established in 2003 to recognize extraordinary women making significant contributions to world knowledge and science through exploration.



## 2023 FELLOW

**[DR. ALIFA BINTHA HAQUE](#), Bangladesh**

Marine biologist, elasmobranch specialist, and ethno-conservationist

Alifa Bintha Haque is a marine biologist focusing on conserving sharks and rays in the global south context with an emphasis on diversity, sustainable fisheries and trade. Alifa recently completed her doctoral studies at the [Nature-based Solutions Initiative in the Department of Biology](#), Oxford, with the support of a Bangabandhu Scholarship. Her research, “Towards a socially just sustainable fishery preserving sharks and rays in the Bay of Bengal,” aims to prepare a sustainability model (replicable for similar contexts in the Global South) for threatened species of sharks and rays in close conjunction with the fishing communities. It places a locally-driven, bottom-up approach from academic literature to action, a narrative absent in the current

management regimes. Countries focus management on commercial species, often neglecting ecologically important by-caught species. By creating a platform for research-based conservation actions that emphasizes collaborating and building trusted relationships with local fishers and traders, she has empowered them to innovate and create sustainable approaches to conserve threatened sharks and rays in the Bay of Bengal.

Through this platform, Alifa and her team have established the largest regional dataset on diversity, fisheries and trade, discovering highly threatened species of sharks and rays, including 15 new records. She also initiated a coast-wide campaign debunking the cancer-curing myth, reaching more than 6000 fishers with their message, providing live-release training in group meetings using audio-visuals, culturally-appropriate murals, printed materials and time. She is developing a pilot for technological innovation, “FishSafe,” an audio-visual device to record by-catch events at sea that will also act as a non-monetary and sustainable incentive to initiate an organized live release and self-regulated catch monitoring.

Alifa completed her BS in Zoology and MS in Fisheries from the Department of Zoology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. As a Commonwealth Scholar, she pursued another MSc in Biodiversity Conservation and Management at the School of Geography & the Environment at the University of Oxford, where she also received her Ph.D. An [Edge of Existence Fellow](#) and National Geographic Explorer, Alifa was selected for the 2023 cohort of the [Edinburgh Ocean Leaders Programme](#) and awarded the best student presentation at [Sharks International 2022](#) for her talk, “Can fishers be the conservation heroes we need them to be?”

  
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