



Ganges River Dolphin

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Why in News?

A recent scientific publication titled "**Rescuing [Ganges river dolphins](#) from [irrigation canals](#) in Uttar Pradesh, 2013-2020**" has elucidated the comprehensive endeavors focused on the **rescue and relocation of Gangetic river dolphins** from precarious situations within the **irrigation canals of the Ganga-Ghagra basin**.

What are the Major Highlights of the Report?

- **Dams and barrages** have severely affected the habitat of the dolphins, forcing them to move into irrigation canals where they are at risk of injury or death.
 - Over **70% of entrapments** were reported **either post-monsoon or during peak winter**, while the other **30% of dolphins were rescued during peak summer** when water levels fall and the minimum water flow is maintained.
- **19 Gangetic river** dolphins were rescued from irrigation canals in the **Ganga-Ghagra basin** in Uttar Pradesh between 2013 and 2020.

What are the Major Points Related to Ganga River Dolphin?

- **About:**
 - The Ganga River Dolphin (***Platanista gangetica***), also known as the **"Tiger of the Ganges"** was officially discovered in **1801**.

GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN

(*Platanista gangetica gangetica*)

National aquatic animal of India

Facts

- Can only live in freshwater; prefer deep water
- Essentially blind; hunts by emitting ultrasonic sound
- Can't breathe in water; must surface every 30-120 seconds for air
- Also called 'susu' because of sound they make while breathing

Habitat & Distribution

- Distributed in Ganges and Brahmaputra River basins of India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Distribution range in India covers 7 states namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Protection Status

- IUCN Red List: Endangered
- CITES: Appendix I
- Wildlife Protection Act 1972: Schedule I

Threats

- Habitat destruction
- Pollution
- Bycatch
- Climate Change
- Hunting

Conservation Efforts

- Project Dolphin (2021): On lines of project Tiger
- National Dolphin Research Centre (2021): India's and Asia's First; in Patna University (Bihar)
- Dedicated Dolphin Sanctuary:
 - Vikramshila sanctuary (Bihar) – 1991
 - Hastinapur sanctuary (UP) – Proposed



- Habitat:** Ganges river dolphins historically distributed in major river systems (**Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu**) of India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
 - According to the recent study in the Ganga River Basin, the species recorded from the main stream of Ganga River followed by the tributaries, **Ghagra, Kosi, Gandak, Chambal, Rupnarayan, and Yamuna**.
- Features:**
 - The Ganges river dolphin can **only live in freshwater** and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting **ultrasonic sounds**, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to **"see" an image in their mind**.
 - They are frequently found alone or in small groups, and generally a mother and calf travel together.
 - Females are larger than males** and give birth once every two to three years to only one calf.
 - Being a mammal, the **Ganges river dolphin cannot breathe in water** and must surface every 30-120 seconds.
 - Because of the sound it produces when breathing, the **animal is popularly referred to as 'Susu'**.
- Importance:**
 - They have significant importance because it is a **reliable indicator of the health of the entire river ecosystem**.
 - The government of India declared it the **National Aquatic Animal in 2009**.
 - It is also the **State Aquatic Animal of Assam**.
- Major Threats:**
 - Unintentional killing through **entanglement in fishing gear**.
 - Poaching for **dolphin oil**, used as fish attractant and for medicinal purposes.
 - Habitat destruction due to **development projects** (e.g. water extraction and the construction of barrages, high dams and embankments), **pollution** (industrial waste and pesticides, municipal sewage discharge and noise from vessel traffic).
- Protection Status:**
 - International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**: Endangered
 - Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972** : Schedule I
 - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)** : Appendix I
 - Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)**: Appendix 1

▪ **Related Government Initiatives:**

- [Project Dolphin](#)
- **Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary** has been established in Bihar.
- [National Ganga River Dolphin Day](#) (5th October)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Q. Which one of the following is the national aquatic animal of India? (2015)

- (a) Saltwater crocodile
- (b) Olive ridley turtle
- (c) Gangetic dolphin
- (d) Gharial

Ans: (c)

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