



GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Why the first-ever satellite tagging of a Ganges dolphin is significant

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) has been satellite-tagged for the first time by the Wildlife Institute of India to study its migratory patterns and habitat use. This initiative supports conservation efforts for this endangered species, which is an indicator of river ecosystem health.

Ganges River Dolphin Conservation

- **Scientific Name:** *Platanista gangetica*.
- **Habitat:** Found in the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, and their tributaries in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.
- **Characteristics:** Blind, uses echolocation to navigate and hunt.
- **Significance:** Indicator of river ecosystem health, controls fish and crustacean populations.
- **Conservation Status:** Endangered (IUCN), Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- **Threats:** Pollution, habitat degradation, bycatch, and poaching.
- **Conservation Measures:**
 - **Project Dolphin:** Focus on aquatic habitat conservation.
 - **Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS):** In Bihar.



- National Ganga River Dolphin Day: Celebrated on October 5th.

(Platanista gangetica gangetica)

Ganges River Dolphin

Aquatic mammal that is a subspecies of the South Asian river dolphin

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE
Primarily in the Ganga, Brahmaputra, Karnaphuli-Sangu river basins and their tributaries in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh

POPULATION approx. 3,500-4,000

Poor eyesight, almost blind — can only sense light/darkness

WEIGHT 150-170 kg

Long, pointed beak with sharp, curving teeth visible even when beak is closed (esp. in younger animals)

Swim on their sides unlike other cetaceans

AKA "susu" locally, because of the sound it produces when surfacing/breathing

EAT Fish, shrimp, possibly turtles and birds

HABITAT Slow-flowing, freshwater rivers mostly in the plains. Often sighted at river confluences.

LIFESPAN 18-22 years (in the wild)

SOUND WAVES Use echolocation (20-160 kilohertz range) to hunt/find food, avoid boats, and navigate through turbid/murky waters. Use high-frequency clicks to communicate with others.

FEMALES
• Females larger than males
• Give birth once every 2-3 years to one calf after 9-10 month gestation period

SOCIAL
Mostly seen alone or in pairs, but may live in groups of under 10

THREATS
• Increased motorboat traffic
• Dredging to widen and deepen river channels
• Hunting for meat and oil
• Development activities such as construction of dams and barrages
• Entanglement in fishing nets/bycatch
• Pollution from industries and settlements
• Overfishing

CONSERVATION
• Declared India's national aquatic animal
• In 2013, granted non-human personhood with rights
• Project Dolphin started in 2020 to conserve species
• In 1991, Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary set up along the Ganga in Bihar to conserve the species

PROTECTION STATUS: **ENDANGERED** ON THE IUCN RED LIST

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ganges-river-dolphin-project-dolphin-conservation-9734143/>