



TAGGING OF GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN - ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: First-ever Ganges river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) was tagged in Assam on **December 18, 2023**, marking a significant achievement under **Project Dolphin**.

WHAT'S IN THEN NEWS?

- **Objective:** Tagging will facilitate understanding of:
 - **Seasonal and migratory patterns.**
 - **Range, distribution, and habitat utilization**, especially in disturbed river systems.
- **Significance:** Tagging is expected to contribute to evidence-based conservation strategies.

Overview of Ganges River Dolphin

- **Scientific Classification:** Belongs to the family **Platanistidae**, comprising two extant species:
 - **Ganges river dolphin.**
 - **Indus river dolphin.**



- **Physical Characteristics:**
 - Males: Length of 2–2.2 meters; females slightly longer at 2.4–2.6 meters.



- Weight: 70–90 kilograms.
- Diet: Includes various fish and invertebrates.
- **Behavioral Traits:** Typically found alone or in small groups; extremely shy around boats, making them challenging to observe.
- **Cultural Significance:** Known by various local names (e.g., susu in Hindi, shushuk in Bengali, hihu in Assamese) and often associated with Goddess Ganga in Indian mythology.

Declining Population and Endangered Status

- **Distribution:** Historically found in Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems (India, Bangladesh, Nepal).
- **Current Status:** Now extinct in many original ranges; estimated population of **3,500–5,000 individuals**.
- **Conservation Status:** Listed as **'Endangered'** in the **IUCN Red List** since the 1990s.
- **Key Threats:**
 1. **Dams and Barrages:** Obstruct movement, food supply, and breeding.
 2. **River Pollution:** Deteriorates habitat quality.
 3. **Poaching:** Targeted for oily blubber; accidental entanglement in fishing nets.
 4. **Shrinking Habitat:** Drying rivers reduce navigable spaces.

Conservation Efforts

Wildlife Act Protection (1986)

- **Inclusion in First Schedule:** Gangetic dolphins protected under **Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- **Sanctuary Establishment:** Creation of **Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary** in Bihar to provide protected habitats.

Conservation Action Plan (2010–2020)

- **Objective:** Identify and address threats, including:
 - River traffic and irrigation canals.
 - Depletion of prey-base and habitat degradation.
- **Outcome:** Provided a blueprint for species protection and threat mitigation.

National Aquatic Animal Status (2009)

- Declared as **India's National Aquatic Animal** to raise awareness and encourage community-driven conservation efforts.



Project Dolphin (2020)

- **Launch:** Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to replicate the success of **Project Tiger**.
- **Focus Areas:**
 - **Systematic monitoring:** Track status and threats to dolphins.
 - **Evidence-based conservation:** Develop and implement action plans.
- **Tagging Exercise:** Lightweight tags emit signals picked up by satellites, aiding in data collection and conservation.

Conservation as an Umbrella Strategy

- **Umbrella Species Concept:** Conservation of Ganges river dolphins benefits overall riverine ecosystems, including:
 - **Associated biodiversity.**
 - **Human communities** dependent on healthy river systems.

Implications of Recent Tagging Initiative

- **Improved Strategies:** Data from tagging will help refine conservation strategies.
- **Holistic Impact:** Efforts align with sustainable riverine ecosystem management, contributing to habitat restoration and biodiversity preservation.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/charges-filed-against-rahul-gandhi-can-the-lop-be-arrested-9735276/>