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Gangetic River dolphin

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Why is in news? Conservation of Dolphin

As per studies conducted on river dolphin, population of Gangetic river dolphin in the mainstream Ganga are known to be stable, although there has been decline in tributaries.

Steps taken by the Government for conservation of Gangetic river dolphin:

Gangetic river dolphin is listed in the **Schedule –I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**, according them highest degree of protection.

Gangetic river dolphin has been **designated as the National aquatic Animal of India**.

The Ministry has included Gangetic river dolphin as **one of the 22 critically endangered species** for providing financial assistance to States under the Centrally sponsored scheme '**Development of Wildlife habitats**'.

Important habitats of Gangetic river dolphin along the Ganges river has been **notified as Protected Areas**, such as Vikramshila Dolphin Sanctuary, Bihar.

A **comprehensive action plan (2022-2047)** has been developed to ensure well being of the river dolphin and aquatic habitats, the role of various stakeholders and line Ministries have been identified.

About the species:

The Gangetic river dolphin is **one of the four freshwater dolphin** species in the world.

The other three are the **baiji**, now likely extinct from the Yangtze River in China, the **bhulan** of the Indus in Pakistan and the **boto** of the Amazon River in Latin America.

Ganges river dolphins once lived in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh.

But the species is **extinct from most of its early distribution ranges**.

The **distribution range** of the Ganges river dolphins in India **covers seven states** namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

The Ganges river dolphins **can only live in freshwater** and are essentially blind.

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.

The Dolphin cannot breathe in the water. It surfaces every 30-120 seconds to breathe in fresh air as it is a mammal.

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Navigation and hunting through a **highly developed ‘sonar system’, using echolocation** (ultrasonic sounds).

They are also known as **Susu, Hihu, Blind dolphin, Ganga river dolphin, side swimming dolphin and South Asian river dolphin.**

They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to see an image in their mind.

Ganges river dolphins are listed as **Endangered** in the **IUCN Red List**.

They are an **indicator of a healthy ecosystem.**

They are the **apex predators in the freshwater food chain** and their presence indicates that the water is clean and there is a good number of prey species such as fish, turtles, crustaceans etc.

Threats:

Dam creation, barrages, irrigation projects and fishing are activities that are dividing and isolating populations of the Ganga river dolphin, significantly reducing its range.

Poachers kill them for their flesh, fat and oil. They are also sometimes injured by machines in the water or accidentally caught in fishing nets.