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E-mail: redflowerpppl@gmail.com. Website: www.rfpppl.co.in

**Indian Journal of Biology (IJB) (pISSN: 2394-1391, eISSN: 2455-8249)** is a peer reviewed print and online international journal presents original and valuable research in all areas of zoology and botany. Indian Journal of Biology updated two times a year covers the latest and most compelling research of the time. This journal publishes full papers, notes and reviews in cell biology, molecular biology, genetic engineering, endocrinology, reproductive biology, immunology, developmental biology, evolutionary biology, comparative physiology, radiation biology, chronobiology, microbiology, pharmacology, toxicology, ecology and other biological fields including instrumentation and methodology. The fused journal will maintain and build on the strengths of both journals, publishing high-quality research across all of biology, as well as authoritative and topical review and comment

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*Indian Journal of Biology* (IJB) (pISSN 2394-1391, eISSN: 2455-8249) is a peer reviewed print and online international journal presents original and valuable research in all areas of zoology and botany. Indian Journal of Biology updated two times a year covers the latest and most compelling research of the time.

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## A Study on the Threats to the Gangetic Dolphin

Sudhan Kumar Biswas\*, Susanta Nath\*, A.K. Panigrahi\*\*, Bivas Guha\*\*\*

### Abstract

*Platanista gangetica gangetica*, the obligatory freshwater dolphin of Ganga river in the world and is distributed in the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna and Sangu–Karnaphuli River systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The diets include wide range of fish, turtles and birds, those are located around the Ganges river. Dolphins are considered as potential ecological indicator of ecosystem degradation of the river. Due to various anthropogenic interferences like poaching, water pollution etc this animal is at the face of extinction. There is no credible estimate of the range-wide numbers and this subspecies was listed as endangered in the IUCN Red List on 1996.

**Keywords:** Gangetic Dolphin; Endangered Species; Bioindicator; Threats.

### Introduction

One of the most charismatic mega fauna of the Indian subcontinent is the Gangetic Dolphin *Platanista gangetica gangetica*. It is among the four obligate freshwater dolphins found in the world. This species has been included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and categorized as Endangered on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List. During the Ganga Action Plan I and II efforts have been made to gather scientific information about this species and habitat degradation, through pollution and reduced water flow and poaching were considered as threats to this animal. In fact, one species once available in the rivers of China was functionally extinct in 2006 (Turvey *et al*, 2007, Hopkin, 2007). At present the Amazon River Dolphin, the Ganges River Dolphin and the Indus River Dolphin are available as endangered condition.

As an endemic animal, the Ganges River dolphin has a fairly extensive distribution range in the Indian sub-continent. This animal is found in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of India and Bangladesh, while Karnali and the Sapta Kosi Rivers in Nepal are the sites where a few individuals may survive. Due to continuous

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decline in its population, the IUCN changed its status from 'Vulnerable' to 'Endangered' in 1996. Its population was recorded as 4000 to 5000 in the early 1980s to 3500 in 2014 in the distribution range (Sinha and Kannan, 2014). The average weight is 330-374 pounds, length 7 -8.9 feet and love to live in freshwater. As an oldest creatures in the world along with some species of turtles was officially discovered in 1801 (WWF, 2015).

### Habitat Preference and Fragmentation

Ganges dolphin is fluvial in habit, but also be found in brackish water, though it never finds in the sea (Sinha, 1997). Salinity defines the downstream limit, while its distribution at upstream limit is maintained by physical barriers and low prey densities at high elevations. The long stretches of deep water in association with shallow water meanderings, confluences and mid channel sand bars are the places where dolphins are abundant.