

Gangetic Dolphins

Dolphins are among the most fascinating and intelligent creatures on the planet. These marine mammals are known for their playful behaviour, acrobatic skills, and highly social nature. With over 40 different species of dolphins found in waters around the world, these animals have captured the attention and admiration of humans for centuries. From the acrobatic spins of the bottlenose dolphin to the unique pink coloration of the Amazon river dolphin, each species has its own distinct characteristics that make them fascinating to study and observe.

Gangetic Dolphin

Sl No.	Characteristics	Description
1	Common Name	Gangetic dolphin
2	Scientific Name	Platanista gangetica
3	Length	2.6 metres
4	Colour	greyish-brown
5	Average weight	150 kg
6	Food habits	catfish, carp, and eel, fish
7	Habitat	They prefer habitats with clear water and rocky or sandy bottoms, where they can easily navigate and find prey.
8	Any interesting facts about them	They are known to be very social animals, often travelling in groups of up to 5 individuals

Features

The Gangetic dolphin, also known as the South Asian river dolphin or the Ganges river dolphin, is a freshwater mammal that is found in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

The body colour of the Gangetic dolphin is greyish-brown, with a lighter belly. They have a long and slender snout, and their eyes are tiny and located on the sides of their head. Their flippers are small and paddle-like, and they have no dorsal fin. They can grow up to 2.6 metres (8.5 feet) in length and can weigh up to 150 kg (330 lbs).

In terms of sexual dimorphism, male and female Gangetic dolphins are generally similar in size and appearance. However, females tend to be slightly smaller than males. The dolphins have several special characteristics that set them apart from other dolphin species. They have a highly arched forehead, which gives them a unique appearance. They also have a flexible neck, which allows them to move their head in various directions, and they are known to be very good swimmers, able to move quickly through the water.

Gangetic dolphins are known for their high-pitched vocalisations, which they use for communication and echolocation. They have very small eyes, which suggest that they rely heavily on echolocation to navigate and find food in the murky river water. They are also known to be very social animals, often travelling in groups of up to 5 individuals.

Food Habits

The diet of Gangetic dolphins mainly consists of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks. They use echolocation to locate prey and then catch it using their teeth. They are known to

consume a wide variety of fish, including catfish, carp, and eel. They also feed on prawns and freshwater crabs.

Habitat

Gangetic dolphins are usually found in deep pools and eddies in the river, where the water is slow-moving and the depth is at least 3 metres. They prefer habitats with clear water and rocky or sandy bottoms, where they can easily navigate and find prey. They also tend to avoid areas with strong currents and areas with lots of boat traffic.

Vulnerable Species

The Gangetic dolphin is considered a vulnerable species in India. The population of Gangetic dolphins in India has declined significantly over the years due to various threats to their habitat, including pollution, damming, overfishing, and sand mining. The estimated population of Gangetic dolphins in India is currently around 3,000 individuals, although the actual number may be lower.

One of the main threats to the Gangetic dolphin population is habitat degradation. As mentioned earlier, pollution and damming of rivers have caused a decline in the quality of water and habitat for the dolphins. Water pollution from agricultural runoff, sewage, and industrial waste has also affected the dolphins' food sources, making it harder for them to find food.

Overfishing and destructive fishing practices have also affected the Gangetic dolphin population in India. Fishing nets and hooks can entangle and kill the dolphins, while dynamite fishing and poisoning of water sources can harm or kill large numbers of fish, reducing the dolphins' food sources.

Sand mining, which involves the removal of sand from riverbeds, can also affect the habitat of the Gangetic dolphins. It can change the course of the river, increase erosion, and cause changes in water depth and flow, all of which can impact the dolphins' ability to navigate and find food.

Protected Areas

In India, there are several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries that are dedicated to the conservation and protection of the Gangetic dolphin. These parks and sanctuaries are designated areas where the dolphins and their habitat are protected from human activities and allowed to thrive.

Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in the state of Bihar is spread over an area of 50 km along the Ganges river. It was established in 1991 to protect the Gangetic dolphin, and it is home to a significant population of these dolphins.

Bhagirathi Eco Sensitive Zone in the state of Uttarakhand, is a protected area along the Bhagirathi river, a tributary of the Ganges. It is home to a number of rare and endangered species, including the Gangetic dolphin.

Sundarbans National Park in the state of West Bengal, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is known for its rich biodiversity. It is home to a small population of Gangetic dolphins, along with other endangered species such as Bengal tigers and saltwater crocodiles.

These national parks and wildlife sanctuaries play an important role in the conservation and protection of the Gangetic dolphin in India. They provide a safe and secure habitat for the dolphins, and they also help to raise awareness about the importance of protecting these endangered

species.

Conservation of the Species

Conserving these dolphin species will require a multi-faceted approach involving several different strategies.

Protecting the natural habitats of these dolphin species is crucial. This includes maintaining water quality, preventing pollution, and regulating the use of river systems, estuaries, and coastlines.

Human activities such as fishing, boating, and development can have a significant impact on dolphin populations. Reducing the impact of these activities by regulating fishing practices, reducing noise pollution, and minimising boat traffic can help to preserve dolphin populations.

Raising awareness of the importance of these dolphin species and their habitats can help to generate support for conservation efforts. Education programs can be implemented for local communities, schools, and tourists to teach them about the importance of these species.

Conducting research and monitoring programs can help to better understand these species and their habitats. This information can be used to develop effective conservation strategies and monitor the success of these efforts over time. Effective conservation efforts will require collaboration and partnerships between various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, local communities, and researchers. By working together, these groups can develop and implement effective conservation strategies to protect these dolphin species.

With the increase in marine tourism activities such as boat rides and water sports, it is important to regulate these activities in a manner that ensures the safety and

conservation of dolphins. This can be done by enforcing strict guidelines on boat traffic, keeping a safe distance from dolphins, and avoiding activities that can cause stress or harm to dolphins.

Pollution can be extremely harmful to dolphin populations. This includes plastic pollution, chemical pollution, and noise pollution. Reducing pollution levels in the environment can help to protect these species and their habitats.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the conservation of these dolphin species is critical to maintain the biodiversity of our planet and the health of aquatic ecosystems. We must take concerted efforts to protect these intelligent and charismatic creatures from habitat loss, human impact, pollution, and other threats. By implementing the strategies mentioned above, we can ensure the long-term survival of these unique species and the preservation of their habitats for future generations.