



BRIEFING

INT

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Main © Moid Shahmawaz Khan / WWF, inset © François Xavier Pelletier / WWF

# GANGES RIVER DOLPHINS

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *PLATANISTA GANGETICA GANGETICA*



## POPULATION

There are approximately 2,500-3,000 Ganges river dolphins left living in the wild. This means that the species is vulnerable and is categorized as endangered.

## MORE ABOUT THEM

More about them: The Ganges river dolphin lives in the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna and Sangu–Karnaphuli river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Its scientific name is *Platanista gangetica gangetica*, and is known locally as ‘susu’, after the noise the dolphin makes when it breathes. Ganges River Dolphins, often called the “Tiger of the Ganges”, is an indicator species, which has the same role in a river ecosystem as a tiger does in a forest. The Ganges river dolphin is essentially blind and relies on echolocation, which means the dolphin senses sound waves in the water to navigate, detect prey and to communicate. It is the National Aquatic Animal of India.

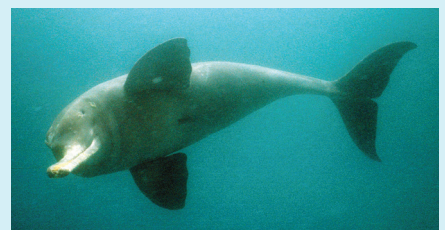
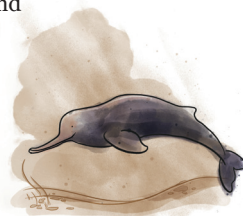
## WHY IS THE GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN THREATENED?

Living in one of the most densely populated parts of the world, The Ganges river dolphin not only faces threats of entanglement in fishing nets as by-catch, but are also facing habitat destruction due to dams, barrages, dredging operations, sand mining, lean flows and pollution. Dams cause the segregation of populations and narrowing of the gene pool in which dolphins can breed.

## WHAT IS WWF DOING?

WWF-India works with National and State Governments, experts, Civil Society organizations and riparian communities towards protecting the habitat and the species through scientific research, community led conservation, species monitoring, policy advocacy and outreach.

WWF-India creates awareness and advocates among different stakeholders along the stretches of Dolphin habitat on adoption of Best Management Practices of irrigation and better protection of the species and the habitat. A flagship program is realizing Environmental Flows to sustain the river's ecological integrity and ecosystem services.



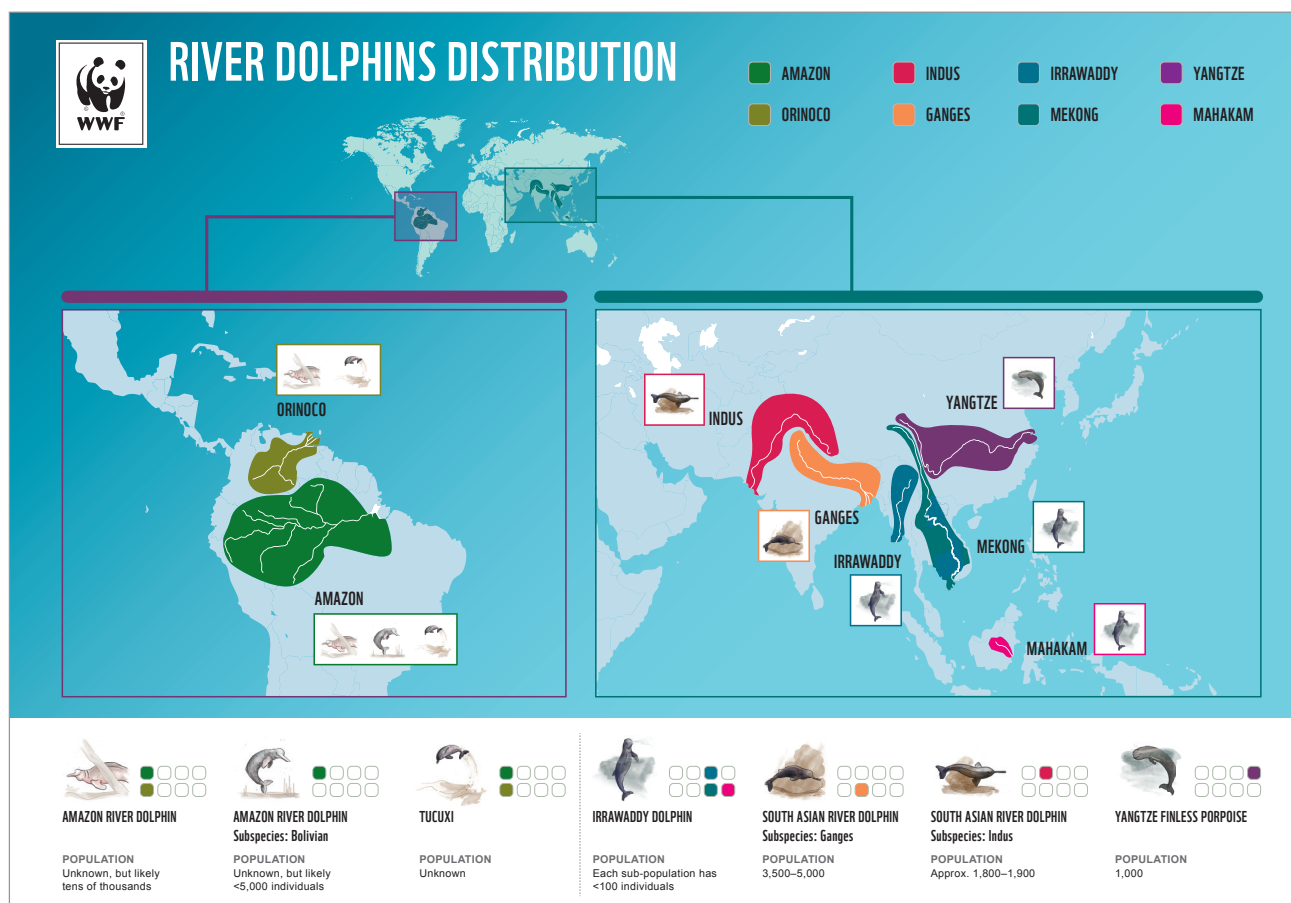
## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

**We need to start galvanizing a strong global community of partners to secure the long-term future of river dolphins.**

WWF is excited to work with local and global partners on key projects including:

- Measuring and reducing water footprint;
- Adopting Best Management Practices for irrigation;
- working with local partners and communities to ensure a sustainable habitat for the dolphins;
- raising awareness and educational activities locally;
- working with key local (and inter)national industries to transform their business practices and adopt water stewardship practices;
- creating a global movement to unite and inspire governments, businesses and communities to secure the long-term future of river dolphins, their rivers and the communities that depend on them.
- working towards a signed Inter-Governmental Declaration by 2021 to protect river dolphins worldwide.

**JOIN US. TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN.**



## RIVER DOLPHINS AT RISK

*River dolphins are found in 15 countries, covering some of the world's most ecologically diverse river basins, including the Yangtze, Mekong, Indus, and Ganges in Asia and the Orinoco and Amazon basins in South America.*

There are however only **five existing species** of river dolphins left in the world today and **they are all endangered or critically endangered**.

WWF's answer to disrupt and reverse this trend is to build a global movement, the River Dolphin Initiative, to secure the long-term future of river dolphins, their rivers and the communities that depend on them.

Our vision is that by 2030, we will have stopped the decline of river dolphin populations in Asia and South America and will have restored and doubled the most threatened populations.

There are three major global threats to river dolphins:

- Unsustainable fishing and fishing-related activities. In Asia, (illegal) bycatch is the number one cause of river dolphin mortality. In South America, intentional killing of river dolphins for fish bait and meat affects several thousand dolphins per year.
- Infrastructure projects that affect habitat connectivity, including hydropower dams, irrigation barrages and

embankments. In Asia, river dolphin habitat has decreased by 50–70% and in South America by 10%. Asia and South America are in the grips of an infrastructure explosion; for example, with hundreds of dams planned in the Amazon, and a potential giant dam in the lower Mekong (Sambor).

- Mining, agriculture and industrial development that degrade water quality. Deteriorating water quality due to agriculture runoff and industrial effluents is a serious threat to dolphins in Asia, while mercury poisoning due to gold mining has been found in dolphins in both Asia and South America.

### HOW WILL WE DELIVER THIS INITIATIVE?

WWF has long-term river dolphin conservation experience, but we know that we cannot bend the curve alone. Our solution is to mobilize a powerful global community of partners to secure the future of river dolphins and the communities that depend on healthy and productive freshwater ecosystems.



Working to sustain the natural world for people and wildlife

together possible [panda.org](http://panda.org)

### For more information, please contact:

Daphne Willems | WWF River Dolphin Initiative Lead |  
Mobile +31 6 19302529 | E-mail: [dwillems@wwf.nl](mailto:dwillems@wwf.nl) |