



BRIEFING

INT

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INDUS RIVER DOLPHINS

SCIENTIFIC NAME: PLATANISTA GANGETICA MINOR

POPULATION

There are less than 2000 Indus river dolphins left in the wild. The species is listed as “endangered” on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List.

MORE ABOUT THEM

Indus river dolphins live in the lower parts of the Indus River in Pakistan, plus about 15 individuals in River Beas, an Indus River tributary in India. The species is adapted to live in the muddy river and is functionally blind. It relies on echolocation. This sensitive and sophisticated tool helps to communicate with other dolphins and to hunt prey, like prawns, catfish, and carp.

Its scientific name is *Platanista gangetica minor*. Officially, Indus and Ganges river dolphins are still perceived as being one species, the South Asian River dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), but clear evidence is building that these two subspecies are genetically and physically distinct, making them more vulnerable to its ubiquitous threats.

WHY IS THE INDUS RIVER DOLPHIN THREATENED?

The Indus river dolphin not only faces threats of entanglement in fishing nets as by-catch, but its habitat is severely fragmented due to barrages and dams. Water diversion for agriculture causes extreme low flows in the dry season, making these dolphins vulnerable to entrapment in small pools and gillnets. Its habitat is facing degradation caused by sand mining, lean flows and pollution. In Pakistan, their numbers declined dramatically after the construction of an irrigation system, and most dolphins are confined to a 750 mile stretch of the river and divided into isolated populations by six barrages.

WHAT IS WWF DOING?

We cannot protect the Indus river dolphin without the help of local communities. That is why WWF works with people who live along vital stretches of dolphin rivers, to reduce the use of agrochemicals and leather industry related chemicals, reforest the river bank, reduce the fishing pressure by diversifying livelihoods. The communities play an important role in the immediate and safe release of entangled dolphins and translocate dolphins that accidentally get trapped in irrigation canals. Education and interpretation centers along the Indus river promote public awareness as does an education outreach programme with schools.



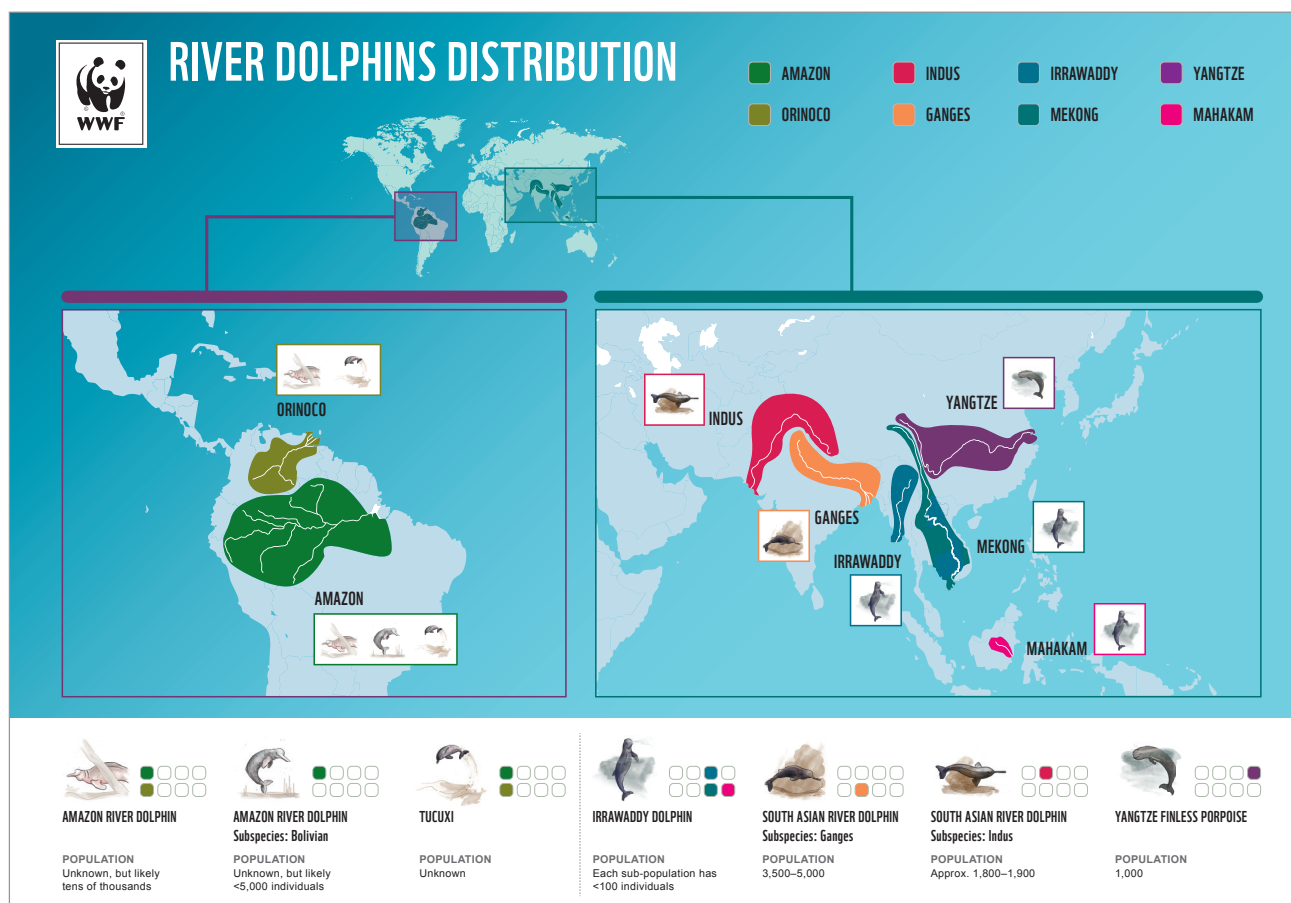
HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

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:

- Population monitoring
- 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.



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