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Project Dolphin

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Project Dolphin

The Ganges river dolphin is India’s National Aquatic Animal. It is nearly blind. It finds prey in muddy rivers by sound. **What does Project Dolphin do to protect it?**



A Ganges River Dolphin surfaces, its long beak-like snout breaking the water. Photo: Kukil Gogoi, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

At a Glance

Key dates, 2009 to 2026.

01
2009

The Ganges river dolphin became the National Aquatic Animal.

02
15 August 2020

Project Dolphin was announced for river and marine dolphins.

03
2021-23

A river survey estimated 6,327 dolphins.

04
17 January 2026

A second range-wide survey began at Bijnor.

Project Dolphin India's programme for river and marine dolphins.
Echolocation Sending out clicks and reading their echoes to find prey.
Hydrophone An underwater microphone used in dolphin surveys.
Schedule I The strongest protection list in the Wild Life (Protection) Act.

Project Dolphin and the Species

Must Know

Which dolphins are covered?

- India's Environment Ministry says the programme covers **river and marine dolphins**. See the PIB 2025 review.
- The Ganges river dolphin lives in the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and connected rivers. See The Ganga River.
- The Indus river dolphin has a small Indian population in the Beas.

Animal	Main Indian setting	Remember
Ganges river dolphin	Ganga and Brahmaputra systems	National Aquatic Animal
Indus river dolphin	Beas River	A separate species
Marine dolphins	Coasts and seas	Many species, not one
Irrawaddy dolphin	Estuaries and coastal waters	Included in the wider 2026 survey

How does a river dolphin find its way?

- The Ganges dolphin has very limited vision. It can sense light but cannot form clear images.
- It sends out clicks and reads the echoes. This is called echolocation.
- It eats fish and other river animals. Its presence can signal that a river still has food and habitat.
- It is not a full water-quality test. Pollution or low flow can harm a river before dolphin numbers change.

> **Quick check 1.** The Ganges river dolphin became India's National Aquatic Animal before Project Dolphin was announced. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 2. Project Dolphin covers both river and marine dolphins in India. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

How Project Dolphin Works

Good to Know

Follow the river threats

- Low or altered flow can shrink the deep channels dolphins use. Barrages can split river habitat and block movement.
- Pollution can harm prey and water quality. Sand mining and boat traffic can disturb key stretches.
- Fishing nets are a direct danger. Dolphins can get trapped underwater and drown.

Match each threat with an action

- Protect connected river stretches and suitable flows.
- Reduce sewage and industrial pollution.
- Work with fishing groups on safer gear and quick release.
- Monitor boats, noise, and sand mining in key reaches.
- Survey dolphins and habitat with common methods. See the programme aims.
- State forest departments, fishers, river agencies, and researchers all have roles. No single ministry controls every threat.
- In West Bengal, WWF-India and partners tested a device to warn dolphins near nets. This is a test, not a proven nationwide fix.

Quick check 3. Researchers can use hydrophones to hear dolphin clicks during river surveys. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Edge

Previous Year Questions

One direct question, and one linked river-history question.

Quick check 4. A river dolphin has no ability to sense light at all. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

A Familiar Conservation Pattern

Great to Know

What does a survey count?

- Researchers travel known river reaches by boat. They record sightings, habitat, and threats.
- Hydrophones listen for underwater clicks. They help when muddy water hides animals.
- The 2021-23 survey covered 28 rivers in eight states. It estimated 6,327 river dolphins. See the PIB survey release.
- That total includes Ganges dolphins and a few Indus dolphins. It is not a count of marine dolphins.
- Older local estimates used different places and methods. The new national total does not prove a population boom.

Protection and a real place

- The Ganges dolphin is listed as Endangered. India's Wild Life (Protection) Act places Ganges and Indus dolphins in Schedule I.
- The Convention on Migratory Species also lists the Ganges dolphin.
- In Bihar, the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary protects a 60-kilometre Ganga stretch. See the WII sanctuary profile.
- See Kailash Sankhala for another Indian species programme. Project Tiger and Project Dolphin protect different habitats.

> **Think it through: why is a new nationwide estimate hard to compare with an older local count?**
>
> The surveys may cover different rivers and use different methods. Detection also changes with water level and visibility. Compare like with like before calling a change a rise or fall. Repeat a standard survey to measure a trend.

Quick check 5. The Ganges and Indus river dolphins are one species with two local names. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Tagging and the Second Survey

Current Affairs

Measured work

- In December 2024, a team tagged a Ganges dolphin in Assam. The Wildlife Institute of India worked with the Assam Forest Department and Aaranyak. See the PIB tagging release.
- The tag can show movement and habitat use. One tagged animal cannot describe every dolphin's route.
- On 17 January 2026, the second range-wide survey started at Bijnor. Its first phase covers the main Ganga and Indus stretches. See the PIB 2026 survey release.
- Later work covers the Brahmaputra, tributaries, Sundarbans, and Odisha. It also looks at Irrawaddy dolphins in suitable areas.
- These are research and planning steps. Success needs repeated counts plus proof of safer habitat.

Quick check 6. The 6,327 estimate covers river dolphins and cannot alone prove that numbers rose. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

When was Project Dolphin announced?

15 August 2020.

How does the Ganges dolphin find prey?

By echolocation.

What did the 2021-23 survey estimate?

6,327 river dolphins.

Which Act schedule protects it?

Schedule I.

Where did the 2026 survey begin?

Bijnor, on 17 January 2026.

Practice: Project Dolphin

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Project Tiger and NTCA

Practice MCQs

1. In which year did the Government of India declare the Ganges River Dolphin the National Aquatic Animal?

A. 2020

B. 1972

C. 2009

D. 1999

See answer ↓

2. Project Dolphin, India's conservation initiative for river dolphins, was launched on 15 August 2020 by whom?

A. President Ram Nath Kovind

B. Prime Minister Narendra Modi

C. The Wildlife Institute of India

D. Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav

See answer ↓

3. The Ganges River Dolphin is functionally blind, with degenerated eyes and no lens. What does it rely on instead, to navigate and hunt in murky river water?

A. An enhanced sense of smell

B. Whisker-like tactile sensors

C. Heat-sensing organs

D. Echolocation, using ultrasonic clicks

See answer ↓

4. What historic milestone in Ganges River Dolphin conservation occurred on 18 December 2024?

A. The first-ever satellite tagging of a Ganges River Dolphin, in Assam

B. The species was upgraded from Endangered to Vulnerable

C. A ban on all fishing in the Ganga river

D. The species was declared extinct in Nepal

See answer ↓

5. Roughly what share of the world's Ganges River Dolphin population lives in India, and what is the species' current IUCN Red List status?

A. About 25%, and Vulnerable

B. About 99%, and Near Threatened

C. About 50%, and Critically Endangered

D. About 90%, and Endangered

See answer ↓

6. Which one of the following is the national aquatic animal of India?

A. Gharial

B. Gangetic dolphin

C. Olive ridley turtle

D. Saltwater crocodile

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The Ganges River Dolphin was declared India's National Aquatic Animal in 2009. It later became the focus species of Project Dolphin, launched in 2020. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Project Dolphin on Independence Day, 2020. It builds on preliminary approval given by the National Ganga Council in 2019. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** The dolphin relies on echolocation, emitting ultrasonic clicks and reading the returning echoes through its lower jaw. This lets it navigate India's murky, sediment-heavy rivers without needing sight. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** The Wildlife Institute of India, with the Assam Forest Department and Aaranyak, tagged a healthy male dolphin in Assam. It was the first such tagging for the species anywhere. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** About 90% of the global population lives in India. The species is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. A 2025 national survey counted 6,327 river dolphins across India, mostly Ganges River Dolphins. ↑ Q5
6. **B.** The Gangetic (Ganges River) Dolphin was declared India's National Aquatic Animal in 2009, to channel attention and resources toward its conservation. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **False.** ↑ 4
5. **False.** ↑ 5
6. **True.** ↑ 6

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