

VIBRANT GANGA 

नमामि गंगे



mammals of ganga river



National Mission
for Clean Ganga



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation

mammals of ganga river

Aquatic and semi-aquatic mammals are distinctive group of animals with unique physiological and morphological adaptations. These animals have developed webbed feet and flippers for swimming under water, valvular nostrils and an intra-narial larynx to exclude water while breathing and swallowing. Aquatic mammals like the otters and river dolphins are at the apex of food web and are good indicator species of health status of different aquatic ecosystems they inhabit.

Three species of otters and one species of river dolphin are found in the Ganga Basin. The otters are semi-aquatic, use bankside vegetation for cover and escape and rocky areas or deep soil for digging natal holts. These species need lateral connectivity with floodplain wetlands.



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Gangetic river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*)

IUCN Red List: Endangered; CITES: Appendix I; IWPA, 1972: Schedule I

Two subspecies (*P. gangetica gangetica* and *P. g. minor*) occur in the Indus, Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems. Males 2-2.2 m and females 2.4-2.6 m. Snout long and thin, a blowhole on top of its head, rounded belly, stocky mid-body and large flippers. Top predators, navigate by echolocation and prey on carp and cat-fishes (*Wallago* sp.). Surface every 30-120 seconds to breathe. Gestation period about 10 months. Give birth to one calf during October to March once every two to three years.

Unintentional killing through entanglement in fishing gear, poaching, habitat destruction due to barrages and dams, pollution and overexploitation of prey base are major threats to this species.



Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*)

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable; CITES: Appendix II; IWPA, 1972: Schedule II

The Smooth-coated otter is distributed in India in all the major rivers south of the Himalaya. Head-body length 59-64 cm, with a tail 37-43 cm, rounded head, hairless nose, flattened tail and shorter front legs. Fur is thick and velvety with two layers; the guard fur keeps the under fur dry underwater to retain body heat. Males are larger than females. Breeds during August to December and gives birth to 1-5 young in a year. Social, diurnal and hunt in groups.

Gangetic River dolphins are exclusively aquatic and piscivorous. Their diurnal and seasonal migration needs longitudinal connectivity in the river and survival mostly depends upon availability of prey base. They are vulnerable to habitat alteration and fragmentation due to dams, barrages, depletion of prey base caused by overexploitation and other anthropogenic activities like land use changes in the river floodplain.

National Mission for Clean Ganga-Wildlife Institute of India project titled "Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga

Rejuvenation" is a science-based species restoration programme. Conservation of these mammalian species is a part of this science-based Ganga rejuvenation programme.

The conservation status of the species are referred here as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendices and Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act (IWPA), 1972 Schedules.



Omnivorous, feed on insects, earthworms, crustaceans, frogs, water rats, turtles, large birds, and fish. Fishes make up 75 to 100% of the diet. River stretches with bank side vegetation and marshes are used in proportion to their availability, especially in summer, as they provide ample cover while travelling or foraging. Major threats are loss of habitat due to dams and barrages, reclamation of wetlands, depletion of prey base, pollution and poaching for pelt.

Oriental small-clawed otter / Asian small-clawed otter

(*Aonyx cinereus*)

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable; CITES: Appendix II; IWPA, 1972: Schedule I

The species is distributed from southern Himalayas and coastal regions from southern India. Head flattened and a short, thick neck, eyes in front of the head, small ears, pinkish nose pads, grayish-brown short, fine, dense and velvety fur. Inhabit freshwater lakes, peat swamp forests, mangroves, streams, canals and rice fields. Monogamous, gives birth to 1-6 young in a year. Gestation period is 60 days. Diurnal found in remote areas, free of human disturbance. Feed on crustaceans, mollusks and small fishes. Major threats are habitat destruction due to changing land use patterns such as increased human settlements, deforestation, poaching for pelt and reduction in prey base due to over-exploitation.



Eurasian otter

(Lutra lutra)

IUCN Red List: Near threatened; CITES: Appendix I; IWPA, 1972: Schedule II

The species is distributed in the Himalayan foothills, southern Western Ghats and the central Indian landscape. It has long lithe body with a thick tail and short legs, sleek, brown, very dense and short fur, webbed feet, and 'vibrissae' in snout. Inhabit highland and lowland lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, swamp forests and coastal areas. Strongly territorial, breeds all through the year and gives birth to 1-4 young. Gestation period is 60-64 days. Feeds mainly on fish and also amphibians, crustaceans, insects, birds and sometimes small mammals. Major threats are habitat destruction due to developmental activities such as canalization of rivers, removal of bank side vegetation, dam construction, draining of wetlands, aquaculture activities, decrease in prey density, poaching for pelt and organic pollution by nitrate fertilizers, and untreated sewage.

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