5. Annual Ganges River Dolphin Census Begins

**Prelims:** Bio Diversity

**Mains:** GS-III: Environment- Conservation.

**Why in News?**

- The Annual Ganges River Dolphin Census has begun.

**Highlights:**

- The census is undertaken by World Wide Fund for Nature-India in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department.
- The census will be carried out along about 250-km-long riverine stretch of Upper Ganga between Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary and Narora Ramsar site in Bijnore.
- During the previous censuses, direct counting method was used.
- This year the tandem boat survey method is being used.
- The method, developed by the renowned river and marine ecologist Gill Braulik, provides a more accurate count of the dolphins.
- The officials use two inflated boats that move in tandem to count the dolphins.
- After collating the data, statistical tools are employed to arrive at the final count.

**Concerns:**

- Once present in tens of thousands of numbers, the Ganges river dolphin has dwindled abysmally to less than 2000 during the last century owing to:
  - Direct killing
  - Habitat fragmentation by dams and barrages
  - Indiscriminate fishing.
  - It is for these reasons that despite high level of protection, its numbers continue to decline.
  - The absence of a coordinated conservation plan, lack of awareness and continuing anthropogenic pressure, are posing incessant threats to the existing dolphin population.

**Conservation Initiatives activated by the Government of India:**

- Declared the Ganges River Dolphin as National Aquatic Animal on 10th May 2010 as recommended in the first meeting of NGRBA.
- A working group was formed to prepare conservation action plan for the Gangetic River Dolphin.
- Dolphin Awareness Program (Phase – I) has been completed.
Further strengthening of networking is being taken up in Phase-II with NGOs, schools and teachers in Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins.

In the upper Ganga, 164 kms stretch of dolphin habitat is under monitoring to minimize potentials threats.

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) in its efforts of biodiversity conservation in the Ganga River basin has been working further on the Ganges River Dolphin Conservation Action Plans.

**Gangetic Dolphins:**

- The animal is known to make strange sounds when it breathes, earning it the nickname ‘Susu’.
- Being a mammal, it has to come to the surface to breathe.
- It is also called a blind dolphin because it doesn’t have a crystalline eye lens and uses echolocation to navigate and hunt.
- It is crucial to find prey in the murky waters of the Ganga.
- Like bats, they produce high-frequency sounds which help them ‘see’ objects when the sound waves bounce off them.
- IUCN Red List classifies Gangetic Dolphin as Endangered.