

## **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.

