



वन विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश



Celebrating Dolphins, Reviving Hope for the Ganga

Commemorating the 3rd anniversary of Government of India's declaration of the Gangetic River Dolphin as the 'National Aquatic Animal' in October 5, 2009, WWF-India, Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and HSBC organized "My Ganga, My Dolphin" campaign, during October 5-7, 2012.

The three day campaign covered 2,500 KM stretch of Ganga & its tributaries (Geruwa, Ghaghra, Saryu, Rapti, Chambal, Yamuna, Ken and Betwa). It targeted at generating awareness on the conservation of endangered species and to collect baseline information of the species distribution and population status, in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

"My Ganga, My Dolphin" campaign led to the partnership between WWF-India, Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and HSBC Bank, while garnering support of the people of Uttar Pradesh and of the Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State, Shri. Akhilesh Yadav. WWF-India adopted the Ganges River Dolphin as a species of special concern and initiated Ganges River Dolphin Conservation programme in 1997. Since then, it has been working closely with the communities for awareness generation about the Gangetic River Dolphin.

Campaign Objectives

- Collecting baseline information of the species distribution and population status in the state
- Creating awareness about conservation of India's National Aquatic Animal
- Developing the capacity of key stakeholders

A Peek into the 'Dolphin World'

Gangetic River Dolphins, considered as the mascot of healthy aquatic environment, are in a dire need for help. The construction of dams, barrages, indiscriminate fishing, and increasing river pollution have continued to pose threat to their wellbeing. Often known as the "Tiger of the Ganges", the river Dolphin is an indicator species, which has the same position in a river ecosystem as a tiger in a forest. Hence protecting them is to preserve and protect the river ecology. For any conservation initiative, baseline data is important and this campaign was the first comprehensive effort to count the Dolphins.

Key Facts about Gangetic River Dolphins

- Known as *Platanista gangetica gangetica*
- One of the four freshwater dolphins of the world, out of which only three are left now
- In 2005, its population was estimated around 600 in Ganges and its tributaries, in the state of UP, MP and Rajasthan
- In India, found in seven states, namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal
- Blind and catch its prey by emitting an ultrasonic sound which reaches the prey
- Travels at a speed of 4.7 km/hour

Campaign Build-Up

The preparation for the campaign included extensive study of the designated survey area and identifying local NGOs and volunteers for partnering in conducting the



surveys. Apart from information sharing of endangered species conservation, the participating teams in the campaign were given trainings for adopting effective data collection skills, leading to a successful completion of the survey. 150 people, comprising frontline staff of the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, local NGOs, researchers, scientists, WWF staff and the local community members, were identified and trained through four training sessions on scientific ways of dolphin counting, data collection techniques and to build an understanding of the geographical area. Observers/members of the survey team were trained to identify dolphins by colour, shape and size of the animal while conducting the survey. The field training sessions were conducted in Narora, Katarnighat Wildlife Sanctuary, Chambal Sanctuary and Lucknow, during September 25-October 1, 2012.

“The training sessions which taught scientific method of conducting Dolphin census, were extremely insightful,” said Dr. Gopal from E- Pahal, a participating NGO.

“Such campaigns need encouragement and should continue in the months to come in order to reach out to more number of people”, added Mr. Manoj Srivastava, from Global Greens, another participating NGO.



Hon'ble Transport Minister flagging off the campaign in Lucknow, UP

The Flag off

A first of its kind, “My Ganga, My Dolphin” campaign was flagged off by the Hon'ble Minister of Transport, State of Uttar Pradesh, Sri Raja Mahendra Aridaman Singh on October 5, 2012 in Lucknow.

After the official flagging off, the surveys commenced on various river stretches including Bijnor, Garhmukteshwar, Farrukhabad, Kanpur, Fatehpur, Varanasi, Panchnada, Chilla, Allahabad, Rajghat, Pinaghat, Katarnighat, Girijapur, Sitapur and Mau. Senior forest officials like the District Forest Officials (DFOs) and Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF) cheered the survey teams while flagging off the survey boats.

Campaign Activities

Field Survey: The survey, which was pivotal to the

campaign activity, was carried out by 150 participants in 18 teams. The 2500 KM river length was divided into smaller stretches, enabling each team to cover 60 to 70 kms of the river every day. It was ensured that each team consisted of eight observers, including an expert in dolphin counting. The boat speed was maintained at 10 KM per hour to avoid the duplication of the sightings. All precautionary measures were taken to ensure the safety of the participants in the river, with provision of a proper medical kit, life jackets supported by a team of professionals on land to guard the survey members from unanticipated emergencies. HSBC employees actively volunteered for the survey of Garhmukhteshwar to Narora stretch. The campaign was also hugely successful in involving a number of young volunteers in the Dolphin survey, inspiring them to become active ambassadors of change.



Team at Narora returning after successfully completing the survey

Volunteers Speak:

Mr. Umang Aggarwal, Vice-President, HSBC Bank

“My Ganga, My Dolphin campaign connected us to the ground realities concerning the conservation of river Dolphins through the vital interactions we had with the local communities.”

Mr. Abhishek Sinha, Advance Relationship Manager, HSBC Bank

“I spotted 12 Dolphins! In all, it was a great learning experience as I was completely unaware about this particular river Dolphin species and related conservation threats.”

Mr. Varun Soni, Student

“The dolphin survey was an absolutely tremendous experience! It was great to learn about the Chambal ecology through the intensive training sessions which were of help while generating awareness regarding dolphin conservation among the local communities.”

A control room was set up in Lucknow for coordinating with the survey teams and for the compilation of regular (every 3 hour) updates on Dolphin sightings. On the completion of the survey, the teams were received by

District Magistrates, other senior government officials and representatives of civil society, who announced the number of dolphins found in that particular river stretch. At Anup Shahar, the survey team was received by the Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) who mobilized the local community members to participate in such initiatives and congratulated the team for successfully completing the survey.

Awareness Generation: The survey teams stopped at villages near the river banks, leading to fruitful interactive sessions along with distribution of pamphlets on river Dolphin, leading to awareness generation about the species conservation issues.

“We plan to make our fishermen community living on the banks of the river aware about the Dolphin stretches and request them not to venture into these zones for fishing,” reported Shyaam Sunder, a villager from Anup Shahar after attending an interactive session with the survey team members.



A volunteer distributing Information Education Communication (IEC) material on the banks of river Chambal

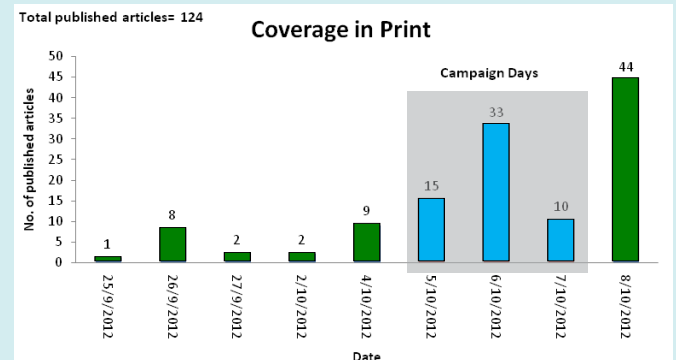
Campaign in Media

The campaign made efforts to reach out to wider group of community through social media activities and regular website updates. Online activities like quiz on river Dolphins on WWF-India Facebook page(from September 15-October 5), uploading of photographs on Twitter and with regular Dolphin count updates generated the right kind of media buzz, enabling the campaign to reach out to thousands of viewers. The online activities were able to achieve 7,000 plus new 'likes' on the campaign's Facebook page.



“My Ganga, My Dolphin” campaign also received wide coverage in leading national newspapers with a total of 124 published news articles. Many leading newspapers gave repeated coverage, enabling the campaign to reach out to not only smaller towns but also to most of the metropolitan cities. The campaign also received good online coverage with various websites publishing campaign related articles on it.

Top Newspapers Covering the Campaign	
Newspaper	No of articles published
The Times of India	5
The Hindu	2
Hindustan Times	5
The Pioneer	6
Dainik Jagran	3
The Indian Express	2
Amar Ujala	7
The Asian Age	1
Rashtriya Sahara	6



So how many Dolphins are there in the upper Ganga system?

The three day long campaign concluded on October 7, 2012 with the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Shri Akhilesh Yadav declaring the presence of 671 dolphins in the upper Ganga system.

“I appreciate the efforts being taken to conserve the Gangetic dolphins through the “My Ganga, My Dolphin” campaign. I would like to share that my government, along with focusing on preserving the environment, is also consistently working towards conserving the nature and wildlife. My Government will provide all the support for the conservation of Gangetic River Dolphin”, added the chief minister.

The closing ceremony at the CM's residence in Lucknow was attended by people from all walks of life, including several senior forest, government officials and Ms. Naina Lal Kidwai, Country Head HSBC India and Director Asia Pacific. She observed, “HSBC is delighted to be associated with the 'My Ganga My Dolphin' campaign which is an integral part of our commitment to the overall mission of conservation of our water resources. As we all know the Ganga has enormous relevance to



India with millions dependent on the river for their livelihood. Besides it is home to several natural species and a national asset attracting tourists from across the globe. We believe in preserving the Ganga in all its finery and this project is crucial for our endeavour."

The closing ceremony of the campaign also witnessed felicitation of Shri. Brijender Singh, Shri Akhilesh Kumar and Shri Ram Swaroop as 'Dolphin Ambassadors' for their exemplary work in protecting dolphins of their respective regions in the state of Uttar Pradesh

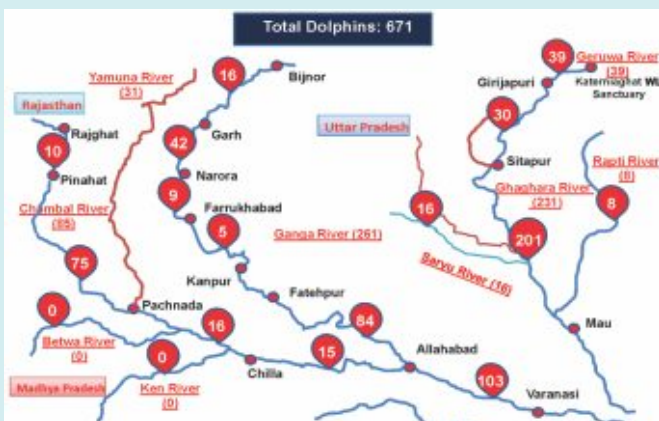
Mr Rupak De, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF Wildlife) & Chief Wildlife Warden added, " This campaign was the first firm step towards developing a Total Conservation Plan for our revered mother Ganga."

Acknowledging the initiative, Mr. Ravi Singh, SG & CEO WWF-India said, "WWF-India would be glad to work with the Government and local communities to develop a framework for conservation of Dolphins and aquatic biodiversity in rivers of Uttar Pradesh including the Ganga"



Mr. Ravi Singh, SG & CEO, WWF-India, Ms. Naina Lal Kidwai, Country Head, HSBC and Dr. Rupak De, PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden presenting "My Ganga, My Dolphin" campaign memento to Mr. Akhilesh Yadav, Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

The Dolphin distribution across the surveyed river stretches is as follows: Yamuna-31, Chambal-85, Betwa-0, Ken-0, Ganga-261, Ghaghara-231, Rapti-8, Geruwa-39 and Saryu-16



The survey reported interesting trends in terms of Dolphin population. Stretches that reported stable Dolphin population and distribution were areas where there had been some interventions taken by local communities, forest departments, and other non government organizations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Is the Dolphin an indicator of river health? Does an increase in number indicate a better health of the Ganga?

The Gangetic river dolphin is an aquatic mammal placed at the apex of the aquatic food chain. The river dolphin is extremely sensitive to changes in water regime and it can be reasonably assumed that this results in changes in their breeding and migratory behaviour. Therefore, this species is an indicator of a healthy river system which means that an increase in population (in numbers and its distribution) indicates a healthy river. However, such a conclusion cannot be derived from the current survey as the last observations made about Dolphin population in 2005, differ in survey style. Hence, the two data sets are incomparable.

Q. How has the survey avoided double counting of Dolphins?

Teams adopted float down survey method, which is a universally accepted method to survey dolphins. This means flowing with the current adopting the line transect method. Enough precautions were taken to avoid double counting. These measures included:

- Maintaining a speed of 10 Kilometer Per Hour (KMPH), which is double the speed of normal dolphin 4.7 KMPH
- All observers/members of the survey team were trained to identify dolphins by colour, shape and size of the animal. In other words, they were trained to identify adults, sub adults and calves. Each team had an expert, a forest official and representatives from NGOs/local community.

Q. How authentic are the numbers? What percentage accuracy can be expected?

This is the first comprehensive survey on Gangetic River Dolphins. For any survey on aquatic species, we assume that the visual population recorded is about 60% of the total population present. In other words, we expect 60% accuracy. We have also taken all precautions to avoid double counting to arrive at near precise numbers





Way-forward

The campaign has taken the shape of one of the biggest participatory surveys on Gangetic River Dolphins. 18 teams with roughly 150 people surveying the Ganga system in three days was a daunting task. Based on the gained knowledge and the ever evolving dolphin trends, the immediate next steps of the campaign include preparation of a short and a long term Action Plan for Dolphin conservation, its habitat and the river. The capacity building of local stakeholders, by giving them regular training to monitor the river health, is also one of the key elements of the future plan.

The team will explore the possibility of expanding this campaign to other states including Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam and other rivers stretches with recorded Dolphin distribution.



Gangetic River Dolphin Photograph taken by : Francois Pelletier/WWF Canon

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, Rajasthan Forest Department, our NGO partners; namely Society for Conservation of Nature, e-Pahal, Nature Exploration Group, Saviour, Turtle Survival Alliance, Samaj Seva Samiti, Parayvaran Sarankshan Samiti, Ganga Pradushan Unmulan Samiti, Holika Bauddhik Vikas Samiti, Peace Institute & Charitable Trust, Gramin Manv Vikas Seva Sansthan, Rajghat Ganga Seva Samiti, Anup Shahar Ganga Seva Samiti, Chambal Conservation Foundation, Kewat Samaj Vikas Samiti, Matasya Jeevi Sehkari Samiti, Global Green, local communities and volunteers.

Special thanks to Dr. Rupak De, PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden, UP Forest Department and to Mr. Ram Pratap Singh, Chambal Conservation Foundation. We would not have reached this stage without their valuable inputs and kind support.

We acknowledge HSBC's financial support to the campaign through HSBC Water Programme.

For further information, please contact:

Ms. Garima Dimri
Manager-Communications
River Basins & Water Policy

WWF-India
172 B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi- 110003
Tel: +91 11 4150 4815

An initiative under Rivers for Life, Life for Rivers Program of WWF-India, supported by HSBC Water Programme