

VIBRANT GANGA 



# Mahananda River



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान  
Wildlife Institute of India

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- Mahananda River, a major tributary of the Ganga River, descends from the Paglajhora Falls, Mahaldiram range near Chimli in West Bengal's Darjeeling district at an elevation of 2200 m a.s.l.
- Mahananda River is a transboundary river with a length of 360 km. About 324 km of the river flows in India and the remaining 36 km flows through Bangladesh.
- It is a rain-fed river that traverses through the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal.
- The major tributaries of the Mahananda are Balason, Mechi, Kankai, and Kalindri river.
- The River bifurcates into two streams at Barsoi in Bihar, one flows through Bihar by the name Fulahar and the other flows through West Bengal as Mahananda.
- It empties into the Ganga (Padma) River from the North-Western side at Godagiri Ghat in Nawabganj district, Bangladesh.



## SALIENT FEATURES

- The Mahananda river basin has two distinct catchment areas; the upper catchment consisting of part of Sikkim Himalaya and the lower Gangetic plains.
- The total drainage area of the Mahananda River is 20,600 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 11,530 km<sup>2</sup> is in India.
- It is bounded on the north by the Himalayas, in the east by the ridges separating it from the Teesta River system, the Ganga River on the South, and the Kosi River system in the west.
- The Mahananda river basin experiences a very hot and relatively humid tropical climate.
- Annual rainfall in the basin is around 1400 mm and the peak flooding season is from July to October, which receives over 80% of the annual precipitation.

- The flow of the Mahananda main stem in India is characterized by meandering and braiding channels, with highly dynamic channel course changes caused by flooding and related sediment erosion-deposition processes.







## BIODIVERSITY VALUE

- 123 bird species have been documented from the Mahananda River.
- Ruddy shelduck, river lapwing, common greenshank, great and little cormorants, common egret species, and Asian openbill are the most abundant waterbirds.



## KEY PROTECTED AREA

### Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary

Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary is situated at the southern part of Darjeeling district and covers an area of 158 Km<sup>2</sup>.

The sanctuary boasts a wide variety of faunal species due to its varied elevational gradient and vegetation diversity.

The sanctuary houses a large number of wild animals such as Bengal tiger, elephants, gaur, barking deer, spotted deer, wild boar, leopards and many birds species.





## INTERESTING FACTS

- The Mahananda River has been quoted in Mahabharata (Sabhaparba Ch.9/22-23) as 'Karatoa tathatreyyee Louhityascha Mahanandah' which translated as the Ganga in Banga (North Bengal) has come down from the matted hair of Lord Siva in the form of 'Trisrota' (three streams).
- The upper course of the River forms an important eastward linguistic boundary between the Bengali and Hindi speaking areas.
- The catchment area of the Mahananda basin is shared by three nations i.e. Nepal, India and Bangladesh.
- Mahananda River plays pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural pursuits of the catchment area, namely Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah districts of West Bengal and Kishanganj, Purnia and Katihar districts of Bihar.

## DRIVERS OF RIVERSCAPE CHANGE

- Rapid urbanization, inefficient waste management, sewage overflow and encroachment in Siliguri have turned the middle reach of the Mahananda River into a highly polluted one.
- Extensive riverbed agriculture, unregulated sand mining, construction of embankments for flood control, and solid waste dumping at village and bridge sites have negatively impacted Mahananda's ecology.
- The river is a pilgrimage site and is commonly used for domestic use and cremation purposes.
- Intensive fishing practices have altered the riverine habitat and its associated species. The fishing intensity is greater than the Gandak and Kosi rivers.



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