

# KRAUNCH

## THE AVIAN

### MYTHOLOGY

The key event that sets the scene for the recitation of the poem is the death of a kraunch caused by a hunter, in chapter two of the first book of the epic Ramayana, the Balakanda. On a walk, prior to bathing in the Tamasa River, near Allahabad, Sage, Valmiki came across a pair of sarus cranes ('kraunch') completely engrossed in each other. While admiring the birds, a hunter suddenly appears and kills the male. The female's heart-wrenching cry on the male bird's death deeply affected the sage, leading him to spontaneously curse the hunter in the form of a shloka, believed to be the first Sanskrit verse ever.

“mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvamagamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ  
yat krauñcamithunādekam avadhīḥ kāmamohitam”

The verse roughly translates to, “Oh hunter, may you repent for life and suffer, find no rest or fame, for you have killed one of the unsuspecting, devoted and loving krauñcha couple.”



### SPECIES IN GANGA

The Ganga River supports 177 bird species, including wetland, riverine and terrestrial species. The tallest flying bird in the world, the Sarus Crane (*Antigone antigone*) stands tall at 152 – 156 cm with a wing span of 240 cm. It is known to mate for life with a single partner. Sarus crane is the state bird of Uttar Pradesh. The species is protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (amendment 2022) and categorised as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List.



### ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Waterbirds maintain the diversity of other organisms, control pests, are effective bioindicators of ecological conditions, and act as sentinels of potential disease outbreak (WII-GACMC, 2018).



### THREATS

Loss and degradation of wetlands, predation, human disturbance, linear developments, collision with power lines and ingestion of pesticides used in agricultural fields.



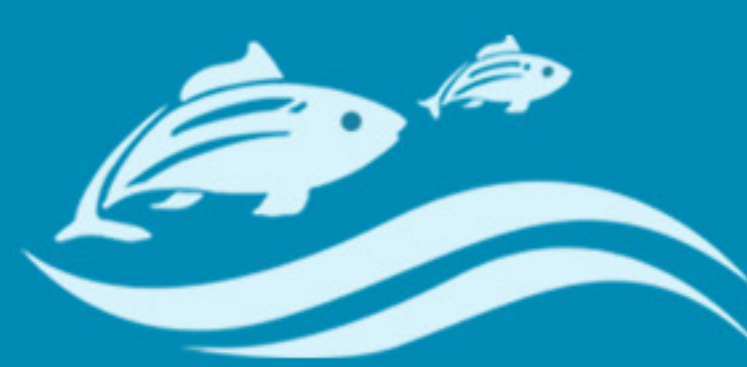
# MATSYA

## THE FISH

### MYTHOLOGY

Legend dictates that during the great flood, Vishnu transformed into a fish, Matsya Avatar, to save the pious Manu, who was advised to build a giant boat and carry the seed of life along with the Saptarishi (the seven ancient sages) for recreating a new world after the major destruction. Matsya, the first of the Dashavatars (ten incarnations) of Lord Vishnu, is depicted as a four-armed figure, with the upper torso of a man and the lower part of a fish. This Avatar of Vishnu symbolizes the restoration of true knowledge, subverted by egoism, which has to be destroyed in the process. In Vedic texts, Matsya is associated with Prajapati Brahma.

One of the 8 auspicious symbols in Buddhism, or 'Ashtamangala', is a pair of golden fishes that usually appear standing vertically with heads turned inwards towards each other. An ancient pre-Buddhist symbol for Ganga and Yamuna, the fishes represent embodied consciousness, happiness, fertility and abundance.



### SPECIES IN GANGA

236 fish species representing 58 families are found in the Ganga River. Some common species are Golden mahaseer *Tor putitora* (Endangered under the IUCN Red List), Common snowtrout *Schizothorax richardsonii* (Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List), helicopter catfish *Wallago attu* (Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List), Spotfin swamp barb *Puntius sophore* (Least Concern under the IUCN Red List), Minor carp *Labeo bata* (Least Concern under the IUCN Red List), bronze featherback *Notopterus notopterus* (Least Concern under the IUCN Red List) and hilsa *Tenualosa ilisha* (Least



### ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Fishes regulate trophic structure and influence temporal availability of nutrients, as they mineralize nitrogen and phosphorus, making these nutrients available for primary production. They also transport nutrient across different ecosystems (WII-GACMC, 2018).



### THREATS

Loss and habitat degradation.  
Over exploitation of their habitats.



# VAHANA

## THE DOLPHIN

### MYTHOLOGY

It is believed that when Goddess Ganga descended from heaven, the Gangetic Dolphin was one of the many creatures that appeared with her. It is also considered as the vahana for the Goddess Ganga.



### SPECIES IN GANGA

The Gangetic river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) was notified as the 'National Aquatic Animal' of India in 2009. Found exclusively in the Indian subcontinent, it is one of the four exclusive freshwater dolphins in the world. The species is protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (amendment, 2022) and categorised as Endangered under the IUCN Red List.



### ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Being a top predator, it rapidly moves between habitats, transports nutrients and energy between systems, and stabilizes the ecosystem through top-down regulation upon trophic interactions, creating habitat linkages. It is an indicator of a healthy river ecosystem.



### THREATS

Loss of habitat connectivity, hydrology alteration, overexploitation of prey base and hunting.



# MAKARA

## THE CROCODILIAN

### MYTHOLOGY

Makara is originated from the word 'Mugger' in both Hindi and English language, and means 'Sea Monster' in Sanskrit. A hybrid mythological being, the Makara is portrayed as the vahana of the River Goddess, Ganga, and the Sea God, Varuna, in Hindu iconography. It is also an insignia on the Kamadeva's flag. FolkKartists often depict the Makara as a real animal, appropriating the Gharial found basking along the banks of the Ganga as Goddess Ganga's vahana. They are considered as the guardians of gateways and portals, and is believed to symbolize "chaos out of which order and creation arise".



**"But most prominently, this beast acts as structural bookend of a thoranam or archway behind a deity. The arch issues forth from the jaws of one makara, rises to a pinnacle, the kirti mukha (the 'Face of Glory'), and descends into the yawning gape of another makara."**

-My Husband and Other Animals: The beast within'  
by Janaki Lenin (www.thehindu.com)



### SPECIES IN GANGA

The Ganga River hosts three species of crocodilians. Mugger *Crocodylus palustris* (Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List) and Saltwater crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* (Least Concern under the IUCN Red List) represent the family Crocodylidae, and gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* (Critically Endangered under the IUCN Red List), represents the family Gavialidae. The gharial derives its name from the ghara (pot) like bulbous knob (narial excrescence) at the end of their snout. The species are protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (amendment, 2022).



### ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Presence of crocodiles increases yield of fish and improves health of fish stock, since crocodiles eat ailing fish. Fishes are also commonly eaten by crocodiles and thus, maintain balance in fish species assemblage (WII-GACMC, 2018).



### THREATS

Increasing anthropogenic pressure of hunting, fishing, sand mining, and fragmented and ltered habitats due to hydrology alterations by dams; Retaliatory killing for Muggers and Saltwater crocodiles; entanglement in fish nets and reduced



# KURMA

## THE TURTLE

### MYTHOLOGY

Kurma is the second of the Dashavatars (ten incarnations) of Lord Vishnu. This incarnation of Vishnu is associated with the mythological story of Samundra manthan—the churning of the ocean by Devas and Asuras in search of Amrita (the elixir of immortality) wherein the divine serpent Vasuki presented himself as a rope, and Mount Mandara, placed on the back of Kurma, was used as a churning stick. In Vedic texts, Kurma is linked with Prajapati Brahma. One of the Saptarishis, the seven ancient sages who are considered the patriarchs of the Vedic religion, is Sage Kashyapa, which means “turtle” or “tortoise” in Sanskrit. The turtle/tortoise is portrayed as the vahana of the river Goddess Yamuna.

In one of the Jataka Tales, Lord Buddha in one of his previous lifetimes takes the form of a turtle, who had vowed to save all sentient beings.



### SPECIES IN GANGA

Of the 24 species of freshwater turtle and five species of tortoise found in India, the Ganga River hosts 13 turtle and tortoise species. Of which, three are listed as Critically Endangered (red-crowned roofed turtle *Batagur kachuga*, northern river terrapin *Batagur baska*, three-striped roofed turtle *Batagur dhongoka*) in the IUCN Red List category and under Schedule I of IWPA, 1972 (amendment 2022). Furthermore, under the IUCN Red List category five species are Endangered (Indian narrow-headed softshell turtle *Chitra indica*, spotted pond turtle *Geoclemys* ha ver turtle *Hardella thurjii*, Indian softshell turtle *Nilssonina gangetica*, Indian peacock softshell turtle *Nilssonina hurum*), two Vulnerable (Indian roofed turtle *Pangshura tecta*, Indian flapshell turtle *Lissemys punctata*), one Near Threatened (brown roofed turtle *Pangshura smithii*), and two Least Concern (Indian black turtle *Melanochelys trijuga*, Indian tent turtle *Pangshura tentoria*).



### ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Turtles play a critical ecological role by controlling aquatic vegetation, serve as scavengers and help maintain the health of rivers and lakes (WII-GACMC, 2018).



### THREATS

Habitat degradation and poaching



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