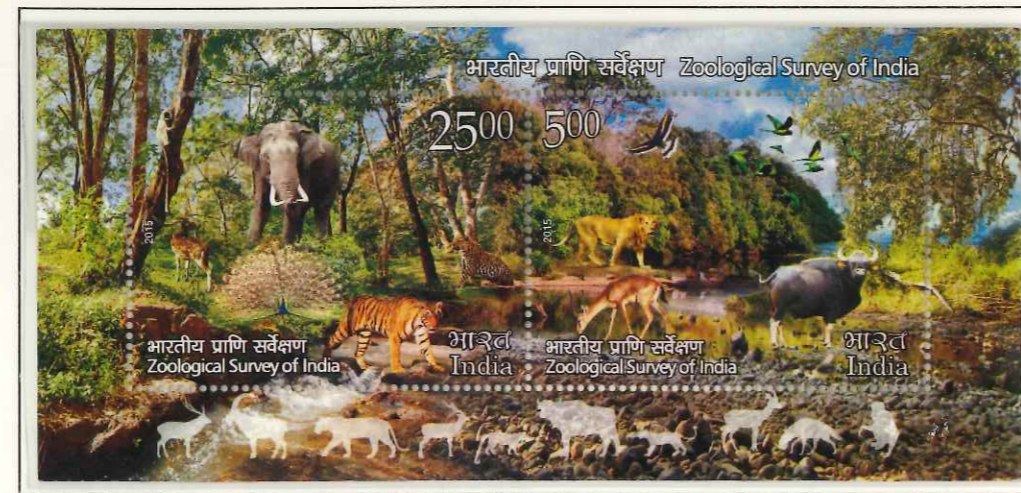


5. ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GANGES

With the Ganga basin spread over an area of about 861,404 sq.km India, the river Ganga traverses through 2500 km in 11 States of India and houses a population of over 300 million. In terms of environmental features, about 15% of the Basin is covered with forests, about 11 percent which is a dense forest, including the Mangrove rich forests of Sundarbans. These forests house a rich variety of flora and fauna and comprises number of sensitive environmental habitats including 2 biosphere reserves, 27 national parks, 75 wild life sanctuaries, 10 tiger reserves in all the eleven basin states.



The Ganges River supports the mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) and the gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*). The Ganga basin also harbours a wide variety of relict species, including the Ganges river dolphin declared India's national aquatic animal, the Ganges river shark (*Glyptothorax gangeticus*), Ganges soft-shell turtle (*Nilssonina gangeticus*), gharials (*Gavialis gangeticus*) and several species of endemic freshwater crabs.

