

The Sundarbans (1997)

The Sundarbans (Bengali: সূন্দরবন) delta is the largest mangrove forest in the world. It lies at the mouth of the Ganges and is spread across areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India, forming the seaward fringe of the delta. Interestingly, the Bangladeshi and Indian portions of the jungle are listed in the UNESCO world heritage list separately as the Sundarbans and Sundarbans National Park respectively, though they are simply parts of the same forest. The Sundarbans is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests, and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes. The area is known for its wide range of fauna. The most famous among these are the man-eating Royal Bengal Tigers, but numerous species of birds, spotted deer, crocodiles and snakes also inhabit it. It is estimated that there are now 400 Bengal tigers and about 30,000 spotted deer in the area.

Most of the plot of prize-winning anthropologist Amitav Ghosh's 2004 novel, *The Hungry Tide*, is set in the Sundarbans.

During each monsoon season almost all the Bengali delta is submerged, much of it for half a year. The sediment of the lower delta plain is primarily advected inland by monsoonal coastal setup and cyclonic events. One of the greatest challenges people living on the Ganges Delta may face in coming years is the threat of rising sea levels caused mostly by subsidence in the region and partly by climate change. Residents have to be careful building on the river delta, as severe flooding sometimes occurs. A 1990 study noted that there "is no evidence that environmental degradation in the Himalayas or a 'greenhouse'-induced rise in sea level have aggravated floods in Bangladesh"; however, a 2007 report by UNESCO, "Case Studies on Climate Change and World Heritage" has stated that an anthropogenic 45-cm rise in sea level (likely by the end of the twenty-first century, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), combined with other forms of anthropogenic stress on the Sundarbans, could lead to the destruction of 75% of the Sundarbans mangroves. Upstream dams can reduce fresh water supply. In many of the Indian mangrove wetlands, freshwater reaching the mangroves was considerably reduced from the late 19th century due to diversion of freshwater in the upstream area. Also, the Bengal Basin is slowly tilting towards the east due to neo-tectonic movement, forcing greater freshwater input to the Bangladesh Sunderbans. As a result, the salinity of the Bangladesh Sunderbans is much lower than that of the Indian Sunderbans.

Source:--Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]