



## **Bhitarkanika: Biodiversity Hotspot of Unique Mangrove Ecosystem on Brahmani, Baitarani & Dhamra Delta, Orissa, India**

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**Abstract:** Bhitarkanika is a combination of two words: Bhitark means “inside” and Kanika means “exceptionally beautiful”.

Mangroves forests serve as ecotones between land and sea and elements from both are stratified horizontally and vertically, between forest canopy and subsurface soil. In India the mangroves are grown in two groups, the mangroves of the West coast and the mangroves of the East coast.

Bhitarkanika National Park is a 145 km<sup>2</sup> (56 sq mi) large national park in northeast Kendrapara district in Odisha in eastern India. It was designated on 16 September 1998 and obtained the status of a Ramsar site on 19 August 2002. The area is also been designated as second Ramsar site of the State after the Chilika Lake. It is surrounded by Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, which spread over 672 km<sup>2</sup> (259 sq mi). Gahirmatha Beach and Marine Sanctuary are to the east, separating swamp region and mangroves from the Bay of Bengal. The national park and wildlife sanctuary is inundated by the rivers Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra, Pathsala. It hosts many mangrove species, and is the second largest mangrove ecosystem in India.

There are different species of Flora, Fauna, mammals, avifauna, aquafuna, marine mammals etc. The national park is home to Salt water crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*), Indian python, king cobra, black ibis, darters and other species of flora and fauna.

There are about 15 species of mammals, 120 species of fish, 271 species of birds, 25 species of reptiles.

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