

How Tinku gharial's nose got swollen

Why do male gharials have that strange swelling on the tip of their nose? Here's the story...



Written by Prachi Galange
Concept by Nikita Pimple



An adult male gharial; and (below) a young male gharial enjoying the sun PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS & K. R. DEEPAK

The Chambal river, the cleanest in India, flowed gently. With it moved the lives of all its denizens. The grey heron stood patiently on a sandy island waiting for prey. The Indian skimmers skimmed the river surface. Their orange beaks were designed to skim just the surface to catch the fish lurking there.

And on the sandy banks lay the gharials, the very picture of tranquillity. The gharials, a type of crocodile, are reptiles. Hence, they loved sunbathing in the morning to warm up their body. Powered by the sun's warmth they would then slither into the green waters of the Chambal and go about their business. With their long thin snouts lined with a row of sharp pointy teeth, they hunted for fish. They lay in wait just under the surface of the water and then... "Snap"... their jaws would snap up the fish.

Their elongated narrow snout differentiates them from other crocodiles, and it is specially adapted to catch fish. Young Gharials eat insects, tadpoles, small fish and frogs; older gharials eat crustaceans and fish. But they prefer eating fish, especially catfish.



Tinku gharial was sunbathing all alone on the sandy bank. He had recently turned 13; a teenager, and felt irritable and moody all the time. Nowadays, he preferred the company of his thoughts and hid from all his friends. As he lay sunbathing, he saw ripples in the water. A snout smoothly cut across the surface and out popped Crabby gharial. Crabby was as usual in a crabby mood and as soon as he saw Tinku, he decided to tease him. "Tinku, all alone again! What's the matter?"

Suddenly, he saw the swelling at the tip of Tinku's nose. "Tinku what happened to your nose!", exclaimed Crabby. Tinku had become very sensitive about his appearance nowadays and felt extremely embarrassed by Crabby's question. "Crabby, why don't you mind your own business," lashed out Tinku angrily. Crabby felt even more spurred, seeing that Tinku was bothered by the swelling.

"Tinku, Tinku
Sitting on the river bank
With a nose
Swollen like a pot"
Singing this song, Crabby swam away.

For the next few days, Tinku's friend teased him mercilessly about his swollen nose. And then even the tip of Gattu gharial's nose swelled up. Now, all of Tinku's friends started blaming him. They thought it was a disease that Tinku had brought to them. Tinku felt very sad and swam

away from them. Crying, he went to his favourite river island, but saw a large, dark gharial already lying on it.

The gharial looked older and much stronger than Tinku. He also looked very long — nearly 15 feet in length. No wonder gharials are one of the longest crocodiles in the world. Tinku looked at him in awe because he also had a big swelling at the tip of his nose. Finally, there was someone to help him solve the mystery of his swollen nose.

"Sir, I don't mean to pry, but why is your nose swollen? Actually, even my nose is swollen and my friends are really teasing me about it. Is it a disease?" asked Tinku with concern. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the older gharial loudly and the water around him vibrated. He asked Tinku, "What's your name, beta?"

"My name is Tinku," replied Tinku. "Well, Tinku, do you know why we are called 'gharial'? It's because of this 'ghara', pot-like swelling on the tip of the male's nose," he said making a strange buzzing sound. "Only males can make this buzzing sound to call the females and we make it with the help of this swelling. This sound can travel a kilometre down the river," continued the male.

"But why don't all my friends have this swelling? Only Gattu and I have it," said Tinku. "That's because only adult males after the age of 13 get this swelling. All your male friends will one day get it, and no one will laugh at you any more. Maybe, all of you you can laugh together," said the male mischievously.

Tinku felt much better after talking to the adult male. He thanked him many times and went to meet his friends. He saw that Crabby also had a swelling at the tip of his nose and all the other gharials were laughing at him. Tinku stood by his friends side and said, "Don't worry Crabby, tomorrow we will all be laughing together."

ACTIVITIES

Read the story well before you attempt these activities.

Activity 1

Answer these quick questions.

- 1) What differentiates a gharial from other crocodiles?
- 2) What is the preferred food of young gharials?
- 3) When you become a teenager like Tinku, did you undergo any changes emotionally, how did you tackle them?

Answers: 1. It's long, narrow snout. 2. Insects, tadpoles, small fish and frogs

Activity 2

Name one each of the following things mentioned in the story

1. River
2. Bird
3. Crocodile
4. Teenager
5. Fish

Answers: 1. Chambal 2. Green Heron 3. Gharial 4. Tinku 5. Catfish

Activity 3.

On a sheet of white paper, draw a gharial sunning itself on a river bank and paint it.