



Wildlife Protection Act, 1972

For Prelims: [Wildlife Protection Act 1972](#), Project Tiger, [CITES](#)

For Mains: [Wildlife Conservation](#). Significance of Wildlife Conservation, success and challenges involved in Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

Why in News?

The [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#) has completed **51 years since its inception**, and over the years, it has been successful in protecting several endangered species. The act has **played a critical role in conserving the country's diverse wildlife**.

What is the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972?

▪ About:

- The **Wild Life (Protection) Act, of 1972** provides a **legal framework for the protection of various species of wild animals and plants**, management of their habitats, regulation, and control of trade in wild animals, plants, and products made from them
- The act also lists schedules of plants and animals that are afforded varying degrees of protection and monitoring by the government.
- India's entry to the [CITES \(Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora\)](#) was made easier by the Wildlife Act.
- Earlier, **Jammu and Kashmir was not covered by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**. The Indian Wildlife Protection Act now applies to J&K as a result of the [reorganisation act](#).

▪ Constitutional Provisions for the Wildlife Act:

- The [42nd Amendment Act, 1976](#), **Forests and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds was transferred from State to Concurrent List**.
- Article 51 A (g) of the Constitution states that it shall be the **fundamental duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests and Wildlife**.
- Article 48 A in the [Directive Principles of State policy](#), **mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country**.

▪ Schedules under the Act:

◦ Schedule I:

- It covers **endangered species that need rigorous protection**.
- A person is **liable to the harshest penalties for violation** of the law under this Schedule.
- Species under this Schedule **are prohibited to be hunted throughout India**, except under threat to human life or in case of a disease that is beyond recovery.
- Some of the animals listed under Schedule I include **the Black Buck, Snow Leopard, Himalayan Bear and Asiatic Cheetah**.

- **Schedule II:**
 - **Animals under this list are also accorded high protection with the prohibition on their trade.**
 - Some of the animals listed under Schedule II include **Assamese Macaque, Himalayan Black Bear and Indian Cobra.**
- **Schedule III & IV:**
 - Species that are **not endangered are included under Schedule III and IV.**
 - This includes **protected species with hunting prohibited but the penalty for any violation is less compared to the first two schedules.**
 - Animals protected under Schedule III include Chital (spotted deer), Bharal (blue sheep), Hyena, and Sambhar (deer).
 - Animals protected under Schedule IV include **Flamingo, Hares, Falcons, Kingfishers, Magpie, and Horseshoes Crabs.**
- **Schedule V:**
 - This schedule contains animals that are considered as **vermin** (small wild animals that carry disease and destroy plants and food). These animals can be hunted.
 - It includes only four species of wild animals: **Common Crows, Fruit Bats, Rats, and Mice.**
- **Schedule VI:**
 - It provides for **regulation in the cultivation of a specified plant** and restricts its possession, sale, and transportation.
 - Both cultivation and trade of specified plants can only be carried out with the prior permission of the competent authority.
 - Plants protected under Schedule VI include **Beddomes' cycad (Native to India), Blue Vanda (Blue Orchid), Red Vanda (Red Orchid), Kuth (Saussurea lappa), Slipper orchids (Paphiopedilum spp.) and Pitcher plant (Nepenthes khasiana).**
- **Bodies Constituted under the Act:**
 - **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL):**
 - **NBWL serves as an apex body for the review of all wildlife-related matters** and for the approval of projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.
 - **State Board for Wildlife (SBWL):**
 - The Chief Minister of the state/UT is the chairperson of the board.
 - **Central Zoo Authority:**
 - The **Central Zoo Authority** consists of a total 10 members including the Chairperson and a Member-Secretary.
 - The **authority provides recognition to zoos and is also tasked with regulating the zoos across the country.**
 - It lays down **guidelines and prescribes rules under which animals may be transferred among zoos nationally and internationally.**
 - **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):**
 - Following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force, **NTCA** was constituted in 2005 for strengthening tiger conservation.
 - The Union Environment Minister is the Chairperson of NTCA and the State Environment Minister is the Vice-Chairperson.
 - The Central Government on the recommendations of NTCA declares an area as a **Tiger Reserve.**
 - **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB):**
 - The act provided for the constitution of **WCCB** to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.
- **Protected Areas Under the Act:**
 - There are five types of protected areas under the Act which are: **Sanctuary, National Parks, Conservation Reserves, Community Reserves and Tiger Reserves.**
- **Important Amendments done to the Act:**
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 1991:**
 - This amendment **strengthened the penalties and fines for wildlife-related offences** and also **introduced provisions for the protection of endangered species.**
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2002:**

- This amendment introduced the **concept of [community reserves and conservation reserves as protected areas](#)**.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2006:**
 - This amendment dealt with the issue of **human-wildlife conflict** and provided for the creation of a **[National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#)** to manage and **protect tiger reserves**.
 - It also made provisions for the creation of a **Tiger and Other Endangered Species Crime Control Bureau** to deal with wildlife-related crimes.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022:**
 - The Act seeks to **increase the species** protected under the law and implement CITES.
 - The **number of schedules has been reduced to four:**
 - **Schedule I** containing animal species enjoying the highest level of protection.
 - **Schedule II** for animal species subject to a lesser degree of protection.
 - **Schedule III** for protected plant species, and
 - **Schedule IV** for scheduled specimens under CITES.
 - The Act permits the **use of elephants** for '**religious or any other purposes**'.
 - The penalties have also been increased for general and specially protected animals' violations.

What are the Initiatives of Wildlife Development Under WPA, 1972?

- **Project Tiger Conservation:**
 - **[Project Tiger Conservation](#)** to conserve the population of tigers. Launched in 1973, the project is still ongoing with the help of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.
- **Project Elephant:**
 - **[Project Elephant](#)** is launched by the central government in 1992 to protect and conserve elephants.
 - A total of 88 corridors were identified under the Act.
- **Wildlife Corridors:**
 - Wildlife corridors **are connected with the protected areas and allow the movement of animals without interfering with human settlements**. Recently, India's first urban wildlife corridor is being planned between New Delhi and Haryana. The corridor is near the **[Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary](#)** to provide safe passage to wildlife animals such as leopards and other animals.

What are the Challenges in WPA, 1972?

- **Lack of Awareness:**
 - Despite being in existence for over 50 years, the **Act has not been able to reach the masses effectively**. Many people are still unaware of the importance of wildlife conservation and the laws surrounding it.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:**
 - With the **increase in human population and the encroachment of wildlife habitats, there has been a rise in human-wildlife conflict**. This often leads to the killing of wildlife, which is illegal under the WPA.
- **Illegal Wildlife Trade:**
 - India has observed a significant increase in illegal wildlife trade, which is a major threat to the country's wildlife. Despite stringent laws, poaching and illegal trade in wildlife products continue to thrive.
- **Lack of Coordination:**
 - There is often a **lack of coordination between the forest department and other government agencies such as the police, customs, and revenue departments**.
 - This makes it difficult to effectively enforce the WPA and curb illegal wildlife trade.
- **Inadequate Penalties:**
 - The penalties for wildlife crimes under the WPA are not stringent enough to act as a

deterrent. The fines and sentences are often too low to make an impact on the offenders.

- **Lack of community participation:**

- Conservation efforts cannot be successful without the participation of **local communities**. However, there is often a lack of community participation in wildlife conservation efforts.

- **Climate Change:**

- Climate change is a significant threat to wildlife habitats, and it is likely to create threats to existing wildlife. The WPA needs to take into account the impact of climate change on wildlife and their habitats.

Conclusion

- The WPA 1972 has been in existence for more than 50 years, but it faces several challenges. Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from the government, civil society, and the public. Effective enforcement, community participation, and awareness-raising campaigns are some of the steps that can be taken to protect India's wildlife and their habitats.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. If a particular plant species is placed under Schedule VI of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, what is the implication? (2020)

- (a) A licence is required to cultivate that plant.
- (b) Such a plant cannot be cultivated under any circumstances.
- (c) It is a Genetically Modified crop plant.
- (d) Such a plant is invasive and harmful to the ecosystem.

Ans: (a)

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