



Need and Importance of Conservation of Animals

Dr. Mahendra Singh Rathore

Associate professor, Department of Zoology, SBRM Government College, Nagaur, Rajasthan

Abstract:

Animal conservation is essential to ensure future generations can experience the wonders of our natural world, with its 3.6 billion years of life. To this end, it is necessary to comprehend how animals interact within their ecosystems and how they are impacted by human and environmental factors. This article examines the important topic of recently extinct and endangered species.

Key words: *Animals Conservation, Wildlife Conservation, Endangered Animals.*

1. Introduction -

Essentially, animal conservation is the act of protecting ecosystems and environments in order to protect animals. At a time when our planet is experiencing its sixth major extinction event in its 3.6 billion years of existence, animal conservation is of the utmost importance. In addition, this is the first extinction event caused by humans and the only one that has occurred since the dinosaurs were wiped out 65 million years ago.¹

Wildlife conservation in India has been around since the colonial period, when resources were very limited and only certain wildlife in certain areas were protected. After India achieved independence, a National Wildlife Board was established, along with the Wildlife Act of 1972 which revised the foundations of conservation in the country. Since then, many amendments have been made to this Act, not to mention changes to the National Wildlife Advisory Board.²

Beginning in the 1970s with Project Tiger and continuing on with Project Elephant in 1992, India's flagship species managed to draw worldwide attention. This international recognition allowed India to join in various conservation treaties such as the Ramsar Convention (1971), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973), the Convention on Migratory Species (1979), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). In an effort to protect wildlife habitats and corridors, The Environmental Protection Act of 1986 and its associated notifications were put into effect. To this day, 41 tiger reserves, 28 elephant reserves, and a network of 668 Protected Areas work together to ensure preservation of their kind.³

The Indian market has been opened up and globalisation is in progress, both of which have led to a huge rise in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unfortunately, though, conservation efforts are being undermined by the system of governance, and the number of endangered species deceased is on the rise. A good example of this would be the 1994 Environment Impact Assessment notification that absolves all railway projects from its coverage even though more than 30 sectors are restricted. The past two decades tell a sorry tale of "green blockade" attempts by so called 'development lobbies'. EIA has put further rules in place for development projects near 'Protected Areas', usually due to fear of forest clearance or destruction of wildlife habitats and corridors.⁴

It is worth noting that at the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee for National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) on August 12-13, 2014, 173 projects from 24 states were listed for clearance with 130 being granted clearance. However, this decision was challenged in the Supreme Court on the basis that the NBWL's constitution violated law (PA Update, 2014-15: 12-22). Subsequently, during a meeting held January 21, 2015, 34 proposals from 12 states were approved. These included road and rail

¹ "What is animal Conservation? Cumbria.ac.uk. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://www.cumbria.ac.uk/blog/articles/what-is-animal-conservation.html>"

² "Priyanka Shankar. 2022. [Commentary] India's wildlife conservation journey has had great strides and many hurdles. Mongabay-India. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://india.mongabay.com/2022/09/commentary-indias-wildlife-conservation-journey-has-had-great-strides-and-many-hurdles/>"

³ "Priyanka Shankar. 2022. [Commentary] India's wildlife conservation journey has had great strides and many hurdles. Mongabay-India. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://india.mongabay.com/2022/09/commentary-indias-wildlife-conservation-journey-has-had-great-strides-and-many-hurdles/>"

⁴ "A. K. Ghosh. Wildlife conservation in India: are we really serious? Org.in. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/wildlife-conservation-in-india-are-we-really-serious--51505>"



projects and those related to oil drilling and pipelines within 27 wildlife sanctuaries and four national parks amongst other areas (PA Update, 2015. 21(2): 21-23).⁵

Additionally, 15 proposals from 10 states were cleared for the diversion of forest land within a 10-kilometer radius of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, which were not permitted under EIA standards. There were a number of projects, such as the construction of jetty in waterways and highways on land, storage facilities, irrigation, canal construction, road building, mining, thermal power, and hydrocarbon exploration.

The numerous development projects being cleared across the nation give an insight into India's rapid progress, but with it comes a difficult question - what are the effects on wildlife? Sariska and Panna Tiger Reserves in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh respectively were recently declared "tiger-less" due to illegal poaching. Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal is similarly affected.

The recent mass death of lions in Gujarat is a testament to human induced mortality in wildlife and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary's diminishing rhino population further confirms this.

Railway construction projects have also had their share of suffering for Indian Elephants, with five times more deaths occurring since the track was broadened - provoking national media attention but, sadly, no action has been taken. The Government of India recently cleared another railway project through 86 ha of forest land in Sikkim, despite the fact that these species are legally protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. The sea turtles off the coast of Odisha tragically suffered from uncontrolled trawling operations causing hundreds of Olive Ridley turtles to wash ashore.⁶

In January 2015, 48 projects which would convert 2,144 ha of forest land in the Protected Area were recommended for clearance. Nonetheless, in some cases, the forest area had not been precisely designated and referred to ambiguously such as "afforestation of boundary of Protected Area for exclusion of part of limestone bearing mineral zone" at Kamur Wildlife Sanctuary in Bihar. The title does not provide information regarding the limestone bearing area mentioned within the sanctuary. During June 2015, NBWL approved 18 new projects and deferred four without a single rejection. These projects encompass six that are situated within five tiger reserves (PA update, August 2015).

It is worthwhile to recall that a long time ago, mining dolomite was entirely forbidden in Buxa Tiger Reserve even though mining had been taking place there for 50 years prior to being notified a tiger reserve.

India's forest cover has the ambitious goal of covering 33% of its land area, with Protected Areas having an especially crucial role in terms of fostering biodiversity and preserving wildlife. The Zoological Survey of India's research into tiger reserves stands as a testament to this, as it showcased how these areas have made great strides towards safeguarding key species and forests. It is also worth noting that to this day, 70% of globally recorded biodiversity exists within forested zones.⁷

2. Extinct Animals of India

India is home to 11.5% of the world's flora and 6.49% of its fauna; however, in recent centuries this wildlife has been drastically declining due to what is now known as the 6th mass extinction. This ongoing event has been noted to be progressing at a rate 1000 times faster than that of natural extinction. To put our current situation into perspective, here are 5 animals (or feared extinct animals) that have become casualties within India over the last few centuries as part of this mass extinction:

2.1 The Indian Auroch

These beautiful animals were larger and more muscular variants of domestic cattle. They are believed to be extremely similar to the extant Gaur, and looked exactly like them, though a little larger. The animals were eventually used for domestic use, but they continued to hunt wild archers. The last known individual died in 1627 as a result of hunting, habitat loss and crossbreeding, which eventually led to the species' extinction.⁸

⁵ "A. K. Ghosh. Wildlife conservation in India: are we really serious? Org.in. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/wildlife-conservation-in-india-are-we-really-serious--51505>"

⁶ "A. K. Ghosh. Wildlife conservation in India: are we really serious? Org.in. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/wildlife-conservation-in-india-are-we-really-serious--51505>"

⁷ "A. K. Ghosh. Wildlife conservation in India: are we really serious? Org.in. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/forests/wildlife-conservation-in-india-are-we-really-serious--51505>"

⁸ "Jeevoka Buzz. 6 charismatic extinct Indian animals in the last 300 years due to anthropogenic reasons. Jeevoka.com. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://jeevoka.com/6-charismatic-extinct-indian-animals-in-the-last-300-years-due-to-anthropogenic-reasons/s>"

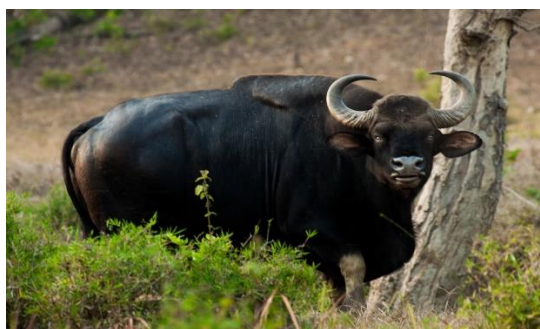


Fig 1. Indian Auroch

2.2 Malabar Civet

This 7 kg civet cat was highly regarded, particularly due to its endangered status. Once flourishing in the coastal region of the Western Ghats, no sightings have been made or documented since 1990 where two skins were spotted. A further expedition went underway in 2007 to find any trace, but this too proved fruitless. The debate surrounding its future has sparked much interest with some arguing conservation must work harder to save it, while others suggest pronouncing extinction would be more suitable given the reason for its disappearance is suspected to be linked to the illegal demand for civetone from its scent glands.



Fig 2. Malabar Civet

2.3 Pink-Headed Duck

Another beautiful species has become extinct, possibly because of hunting and habitat loss. This large duck, found around the Ganges and already rare, hasn't been seen for 80 years and has been declared extinct.⁹



Fig 3. Pink-Headed Duck

⁹ "Jeevoka Buzz. 6 charismatic extinct Indian animals in the last 300 years due to anthropogenic reasons. Jeevoka.com. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://jeevoka.com/6-charismatic-extinct-indian-animals-in-the-last-300-years-due-to-anthropogenic-reasons/>

2.4 Himalayan Quail

Currently, this bird is on the list of possibly extinct animals since 1867, when it was last recorded in Mussoorie. It is a medium-sized bird that used to live in the Uttarakhand region. Human hunting activities are again likely to be the cause of extinction.



Fig 4. Himalayan Quail

2.5 Indian Javan Rhinocéros

A once widespread rhinoceros species, the Javan Rhino is now one of the world's most endangered species. Currently, they are extinct in India. This species used to thrive along the Bengal and Assam belts, as well as all across south-east Asia, but now it is found only in the Ujong Kulon National Park of Java. The decline can be attributed to poaching for their horns, which is threatening all rhinoceros species.¹⁰

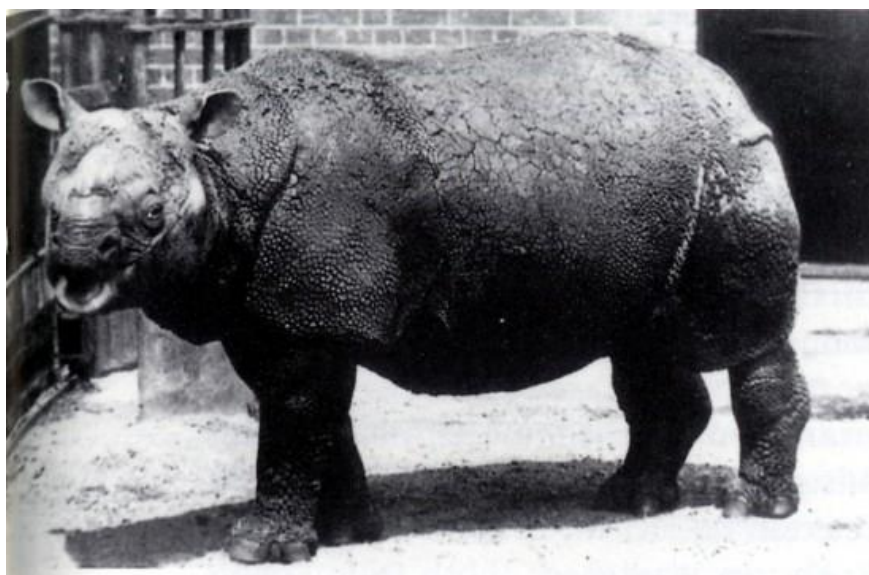


Fig 5. Indian Javan Rhinocéros

2.6 Asiatic Cheetah

This case has recently resurfaced due to the reintroduction of the Asiatic cheetah, a species extinct in India for the past 70 years - since the last wild one was killed for sport. The growing demand for keeping these animals as pets has been strongly resisted, since they do not survive in captivity. The risk of genetic bottlenecking makes it of extreme importance to plan their re-introduction carefully, assessing all possible ramifications beforehand.

Proponents of the idea that “it’s alright to not conserve species as new ones can come up” fail to recognize that the natural rate of species extinction is relatively steady, yet the rate of species extinction due to human activities is 1000 times higher than this.

¹⁰ “Jeevoka Buzz. 6 charismatic extinct Indian animals in the last 300 years due to anthropogenic reasons. Jeevoka.com. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://jeevoka.com/6-charismatic-extinct-indian-animals-in-the-last-300-years-due-to-anthropogenic-reasons/>

This means that an estimated 200-2000 species become extinct each year. Therefore, it's obvious why conservation and protection are so crucial; it's our responsibility to prevent such an alarming level of destruction from occurring.¹¹



Fig 6. Asiatic Cheetah

3. Endangered Animals in India

The last 50 years have seen exponential growth in human population, unsustainable development and unprecedented urbanisation; this has caused the destruction of hundreds of million acres of forests all over the globe. This has resulted in the loss of habitats and food for wildlife, leading to a sixth mass extinction exponentially accelerating - a 2020 analysis puts over 500 species of land animals on the brink of being lost in the next two decades. In India, this is further compounded by its high population ratio and rampant human activity that destroys land. These are 10 endangered species within India who are facing an urgent threat to their survival and need immediate protection.¹²

Bengal Tiger: Bengal tigers make up almost half of the total number of tigers worldwide, with 70% living in India. Despite its adaptability to different habitats - ranging from forests and mangroves to wetlands - and its ability to survive in various temperatures, this majestic big cat is threatened by poaching, trophy hunting and habitat loss due to urban development. Occupying just 7% of the territory it used to inhabit, fewer than 2,000 remain in the wild. Meanwhile, human-wildlife conflict resulting from India's high population density has also been a factor exacerbating their decline.¹³

Asiatic Lion: The Asiatic lion, native to South West Asia and eastern India, is approximately 10-20% smaller than its African relatives. It has a larger tail tuft than them and has a distinct belly fold that distinguishes it from the rest. There are only 500-650 of these beasts left in the country, classified as endangered by the IUCN since 2010, mostly confined within the Gir Forest. That doesn't stop farmers from utilizing crude measures such as electric fences to protect their crops though. Unfortunately, this often leads to lions getting caught up in them. Furthermore, nearly 20,000 open wells dug in the area for irrigation have caused numerous accidental fatalities among lions due to drowning.¹⁴

Snow Leopards: Snow leopards used to inhabit a much larger region than they do today. Limited now only to the Himalayas and other parts of India, such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, their population has dwindled to a meagre 500. The main reason for this drastic decrease is, sadly, human interference in the form of poaching for its pelt and body parts; there is also an escalating loss of prey due to an increase in domestic livestock that has depleted the high-altitude pastures. Another challenge is open hostility from local populations who live near snow leopards' habitats as well as damage caused by hydroelectric

¹¹ "Jeevoka Buzz. 6 charismatic extinct Indian animals in the last 300 years due to anthropogenic reasons. Jeevoka.com. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://jeevoka.com/6-charismatic-extinct-indian-animals-in-the-last-300-years-due-to-anthropogenic-reasons/>

¹² "Olivia Lai. 2021. 10 of the most endangered species in India. Earth.org. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://earth.org/endangered-species-in-india/>"

¹³ "Olivia Lai. 2021. 10 of the most endangered species in India. Earth.org. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://earth.org/endangered-species-in-india/>"

¹⁴ "Olivia Lai. 2021. 10 of the most endangered species in India. Earth.org. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://earth.org/endangered-species-in-india/>"



and mining projects that ruin the animal's natural environment. Added to this is the difficulty of recovering numbers since female snow leopards produce one or two cubs only once every two years.

Blackbuck: Once highly sought after for their pelts, the diminishing numbers of blackbucks over India has given them a status as one of India's most endangered species. In 1947, there were 80,000 blackbucks but by 1966 that number had dropped to 8,000. Conservation efforts have resulted in an increase back up to 25,000 but threats such as preying stray dogs (India having one of the highest rates), pesticides and moving vehicles now pose a danger. The blackbucks are mostly found in small herds in open grasslands, dry scrub areas and thinly forested areas of India and have been introduced in Argentina and the United States for population growth.¹⁵

The list of endangered animals is increasing and many animals are entering the extinct animals, so it's important we wake up and to something positive.

Conclusion

We are ensuring the survival, breeding and flourishing of all diverse species in an area by conserving wildlife and forests. As habitats for wildlife and as components of various food chains and food webs, forests are crucial for ecological stability. The preservation of wildlife is essential for the prevention of issues like drought, new deserts, fires and floods. Additionally, this conservation guarantees that future generations of both people and animals will grow up surrounded by nature and develop an affinity for it that reinforces the importance of wildlife. Beyond simply being valuable in their own right, animals and plants are a vital part of the bigger natural environment that can provide indispensable resources such as food, shelter and water to other creatures and humans. Conservation is all about caring for these resources so that they continue to exist for the generations to come. It involves preserving species diversity, genes and ecosystems as well as maintaining natural functions like nutrient cycling.

¹⁵ “Olivia Lai. 2021. 10 of the most endangered species in India. Earth.org. Retrieved January 13, 2023 from <https://earth.org/endangered-species-in-india/>”