

POACHING OF ANIMALS IN INDIA

Introduction: Wildlife is on the brink of extinction due to poaching. Poaching is the act of hunting, killing and selling (or using) of wildlife species for monetary or materialistic gains. It is illegal to hunt or poach. Many species are already endangered, vying for an effective monitoring policy.

Professional organised poaching gangs basically hunt wildlife that has high economic value. States like Orissa have a large-scale organised poaching racket that leads to rapid loss of endangered species. Hunting is prohibited in National Parks and Zoos; influential persons however get away with law after their alleged involvement. Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was enforced to ban hunting.

Hunting Techniques

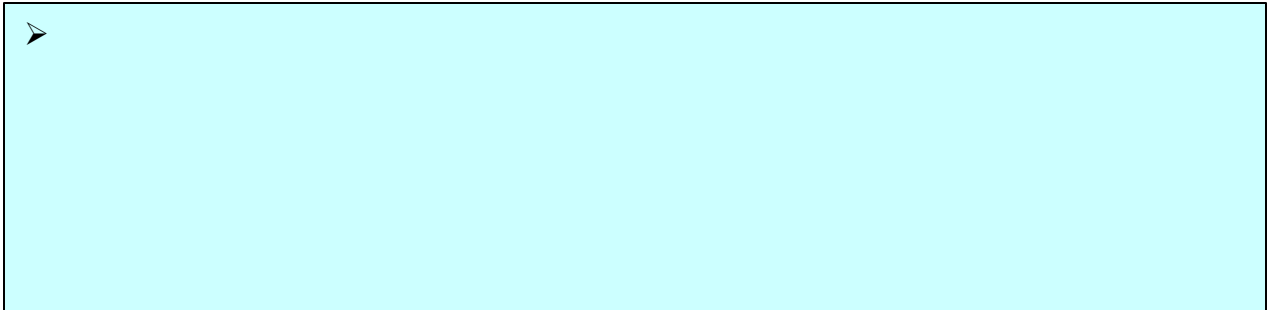
- Hunting on foot at night using locally crafted muzzle loading guns is one of the most popular means because it is very efficient, though risky.
- Water holes, fruiting trees and croplands bordering forests are favorite spots for stalking wildlife. Snares using telephone wires and automobile clutch cables are set on the forest path regularly used by the animal. Often leopards and tigers get caught and die in the snares.
- Using of lime on fruiting trees is a method to hunt birds.
- Baited explosives are used to hunt pigs.
- Dynamites are used to poach fish.
- Traditionally, hunting dogs are used to hunt wild boar
- Poisoned water placed in broken earthen pots is another popular method for large carnivores that threaten livestock.
- Also, jaw traps are used for hunting large carnivores like tigers
- High voltage live electric wires connected to fences are used to eliminate elephants and pigs.

Species Endangered Due to Poaching

A) **Shahtoosh**

- ❖ Shahtoosh wool is obtained from Tibetan antelope or chiru and is used to make products like shawls etc, which have a thriving international market.
- ❖ World Wide Fund For Nature lists them under 'endangered species'.
- ❖ Chirus are found in regions of Tibet, China, Kashmir and Laddakh at an altitude of over 3700 – 5000 metres.
- ❖ A Shahtoosh shawl is made from 100 to 150 gram of pure Shahtoosh and can fetch anywhere between Rs 50,000 to Rs 4 lakh.
- ❖ 3 – 4 antelopes are killed to produce a shawl that weighs about 500 grams.
- ❖ About 20,000 chirus are killed every year to make Shahtoosh shawls, according to conservationists.

- ❖ The chiru population has declined from a million at the turn of the century to about 70,000.
- ❖ Chiru comes under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and its hunting is banned.
- ❖ The ban on Shahtoosh trading has hit an industry worth \$160 million affecting the livelihood of 30,000 workers. Women are especially bearing the brunt as the cleaning, weaving and spinning of the Shahtoosh wool or toosha were done by them.



B) Tusks

Ivory trade in India exists, defying its ban. The main sources for ivory in India are poaching, domesticated elephants, smuggled African ivory and pre-existing ivory stock. Killing of elephant for ivory is rampant in states like Orissa, Uttaranchal, Assam, UP and Karnataka. The proportion of sub-adult and adult tuskers has dropped drastically in the last 20 years. The profit in the trade outweighs the fear of being caught.

C) One-horned Asiatic Rhino

These rare rhinos are found in protected habitats in India such as Barida National Park in Nepal and Assam. Poachers kill them even in these protected habitats.

D) Olive Ridley turtle

The beach of Orissa's Bhitarkanika Marine Sanctuary is the largest mass nesting site of the Olive Ridley in the world. Over the years their population is fast depleting in the world. Other mass nesting sites recently noticed in India are: Rushikulya River mouth, Purunabandha village (Orissa). This village has a UNDP award for protecting the endangered turtles. In 2003 around 2 lakh turtles arrived and 5 million turtle babies made it to the water. Devi River mouth (Orissa).

The turtles are getting endangered because:

- ❖ India could not enforce protection laws due to lack of funds.
- ❖ Ridley turtles are killed for their meat and leather. More than 1 lakh turtles have been killed during the last decade in Orissa.
- ❖ Predators like feral dogs, wild pigs, jackals and hyenas prey on the turtle eggs.
- ❖ The turtles get trapped along with other fish in the mechanised fishing trawlers with drift nets. Even the mandatory turtle excluder devices are not of much help.

- ❖ Beach erosions that occur due to strong winds destroy the eggs.
- ❖ Casuarina plantations on beaches drastically reduce the rookery space.
- ❖ Construction of fishing jetties by the government near the turtle nesting sites deterred their arrivals.

E) Bird poaching

Sedimentation, encroachment and concrete complexes have resulted in the depletion of several urban wetlands, drastically reducing the bird population. However, apart from habitat destruction, poaching plays a pivotal role too.

About 40 species of water birds (River Terns, Sandpipers, Pelicans, White Necked Stork, and Booted Hawk Eagles etc) migrate to the south and visit nearby tanks of Bangalore every year. These birds depend on the tanks for roosting, breeding and food. However, bird traps are laid on the edge of the tank and about 50 birds are caught in a day!

F) Frog

Frog hunting is considered a sport and a gourmet's delight. Catching, killing and exporting frogs are done against the Wildlife Protection Act. Frogs play a vital role in the food chain of the eco-system, help prevent spread of diseases by consuming insects and are necessary to maintain the ecological balance.

G) Exotic butterflies

Rare species of butterflies such as Crysochroa Rogini command a price of \$275 apiece. This is an organised racket with smugglers procuring butterflies from India and Nepal and sending them to other countries via deals on the Internet. Butterflies and moths are placed in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which prohibits commerce in wildlife articles.

Asia's largest brackish water lagoon, **Chilika**, faces wetland siltation, decline in fish crab and prawn production due to obstruction of migratory routes, large-scale poaching which has affected 30 aquatic species as their juveniles have been killed. Fixed nets are used as traps and barricades for unauthorised shrimp culture that prevents free flow of sediments. This unauthorised fishing disturbs the ecologically sensitive shoreline and creeks of the lagoon.

H) Peacock

The peacocks jewel coloured plumes are at their peak during the monsoons, and are thus hunted by poachers. Poachers scatter poison-laced birdseed which the birds consume giving a death which is slow and painful. The feathers are expensive and have an international demand.

I) Tiger

They are hunted for self-consumption or for the money they fetch in the urban market. They have high value in international bone and skin market.

ANIMAL	KILLED FOR
Tiger	bones, skin, nails
Leopard	skin
Peacock	feather, meat
Deer	antler, musk, meat
Wild pig	meat
Rhinoceros	horn
Turtle	meat, leather, eggs

Impact of Hunting

- ❖ Several species could be stamped out.
- ❖ The hunting of herbivores will directly affect the carnivores that are dependent on them. Thus the prey depletion is one of the most serious threats to the tigers. The population densities, survival rates and chance of persistence are all strongly tied to the densities of their principal prey.
- ❖ Even if small populations exist in an area, they could be “ecologically extinct”, that is, they no longer fulfill their ecological role in the forest, which affects the forest population.
- ❖ Vast stretches of forests in areas of North East India are bereft of wildlife as they have been hunted to extinction. Such forests cannot be considered ecologically alive.

Methods to Control Poaching

- ❖ Mechanism for strict implementation of law needs to be given topmost precedence. It is imperative to have a foot patrol, which is a very efficient way of controlling inconspicuous poaching activities.
- ❖ Intelligence gathering via strategically located anti-poaching camps that serve as excellent deterrents to poachers and smugglers should be indispensable in all our national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, along with manned gates, night curfews on the movement of vehicles.
- ❖ Strict control should be exercised on the issuance of license of firearms around important protected areas.
- ❖ The forest department should adopt scientific management practices for wildlife protection.
- ❖ Forest department guards and senior officials have to be trained on hunting patterns, method and ecology of hunting species.
- ❖ Community education and involvement can help curb this illegal activity.
- ❖ Government’s recent proposals are to allow private persons to breed animals in captivity for medicinal purposes: The Ministry of Environment and Forests has acknowledged that typical conservation methods are not working due to lack of resources.

The rural areas of **Greater Noida** have become a haven for poachers as shooting of deers and blue-bulls are on with impunity under the police protection.

Legalise Banned Possessions

The new ‘amnesty’ provisions by the Central amendment to the Environment Protection Act, 1972, the **Declaration Of Wildlife Stock Rules, 2003**, permits persons (not traders) with ‘prohibited’ wildlife items like captive animal or bird, an article or trophy derived from animals specified under the Wildlife Protection Act, to apply for a **‘possession certificate’**. Keeping undeclared wildlife products or animals is punishable with a jail term of 3 to 7 years and a fine of over Rs 10000. The Wildlife Trust of India and the International Fund for Animal welfare have been campaigning against the manufacture and sale of Shahtoosh since 2 years. They demanded that those who unknowingly bought the shawl be given a chance to legalise them. However the danger that people may try to pass off illegally acquired skins etc as inherited ones, exists.

- ❖ The musk deer is chosen as the first animal that is endangered, found in the Himalayas and is killed indiscriminately for making medicines for rheumatism. The demand for their products is ever increasing in the market and is met illegally and brutally. But if reared commercially, they can complete their entire lifespan and continue yielding musk and antlers for many years.
- ❖ Other animals whose private breeding maybe allowed are tigers, rhinos, peacocks, deers and birds.
- ❖ Red pandas and lion tailed macaws have had successful captive breeding and their poaching also reduced.
- ❖ Allowing the export of shed antlers: Their trading was banned in 1999; however the ministry has allowed exports in order to check the illegal trade.

The international market demand for products from these endangered species is a dominating factor that renders the protection policies worthless. Lack of awareness and understanding of the role that these species play in this delicate ecosystem will soon result in their extinction. However there is no dearth of protection policies. It is their implementation that plays the pivotal role, and that is the missing link.

WWF-India as an ENVIS Centre/Node has been keeping a tab on the media activity on environment related issues and carries out analysis on different issues in media.

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