

Essay on Wild Life Protection

"Hunters and traders in fur, ivory, animals, and animal articles have in their greed plundered forests and killed millions of innocent animals all over the world in order to make quick bucks, causing so many, animals to be extinct and threatening many others. These disastrous acts still go on. Living creatures being so dependant on each other and the survival of the human race also being dependant on them has caused great concern in the international community right from the beginning of the 20th century".

Nature has been the core of human existence. Over a period of time we, humans have in so many ways in the so-called quest for development and making inventions and discoveries exploited and ravaged the base of our very existence.

The environment consists of the physical surroundings and conditions including the quality of air, water, greenery, vegetation, and all forms of living creatures forming a habitat. Most of us in some part of our lives have experienced the "Web of Life" which shows us that every form of life is dependant on the other for its survival, right from the algae and fungi down to humans. The extinction of any species or creatures only goes out to break the chain of the cycle of normality of a balanced ecology.

In 1963, the World Conservation Union (IUCN Gen. assembly) passed a resolution calling for an international convention on regulations on export, transit, and import of rare or threatened wildlife species, their skins, and trophies. Ten years later 21 countries signed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The main aim is to check on the overexploitation

through International Trade.

In 1972, the endangering of various species due to Trade in skins of Lizards, Monitors, Snakes, etc. sold in millions along with those of the Tiger, Rhino horns, Bear paws, and gall bladders accelerated India to enact the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972. India joined CITES in 1976 by Ratification.

However, the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 had some flaws and loopholes which were abused by unscrupulous traders, this led to an amendment in 1986. There was a great influence on the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 by CITES, which led to an amendment in 1991 and caused the act to be even more stringent. Some of the salient features of the amendment were: That all hunting of Wildlife under Appendix, I of Cites was prohibited. Collection and Trade in Specified plants (Dead or Alive) were prohibited.

Verification and Marking with identification of stock of wildlife products of licensed dealers was required. Transportation of wildlife and wildlife products required a permit from an authorized officer that the product had been legally acquired. Trade-in Ivory and its products were completely banned. Issue of firearms License within 10 Kms of a sanctuary without the concurrence of the wildlife warden was prohibited. Vehicles, Arms, Vessels, and Weapons used to commit offenses under the Act were to be seized. Commercial felling and exploitation flora was banned. Individuals and were allowed to take instances of violations directly to courts. A Central Zoo Authority was set up to ensure sound management of the Zoos.

CITES has played a very remarkable role in the development of wildlife in India by working in coordination with Organizations like WWF-India and TRAFFIC-India by improving the enforcement of CITES through Policy as well as Law, Controlling Trade in wildlife and

wildlife products, Organizing training courses for Enforcement agencies like Police, Customs, Central Forensic Labs, INTERPOL officials, Parliamentarians, members of the Judiciary, etc. It had been observed that it was only with the coordination and cooperation of these officials that with the objectives of CITES.

The enforcement of CITES was, however, the responsibility of member states. CITES management Centers have been set up in Amritsar, Dehradun, Delhi, Guwahati, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Cochin, and Tuticorin. India is also responsible to submit an annual report to CITES based on its developments.

Some important Points of The Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972

(a) Wildlife may include any animal, bees, butterflies, crustacea, fish and moths; and aquatic or land vegetation that form part of any habitat.

(b) Wild animal would mean any animal found wild in nature and includes any animal specified in Schedule I, Schedule II, Schedule III, Schedule IV or Schedule V wherever found.

(c) Habitat would include land, water, or vegetation which is the natural home of any wild animal.

(d) Hunting would include capturing, killing, poisoning, snaring, and trapping of any wild animal and includes any attempt to do so or even driving an animal for the purpose. Injuring or destroying or taking any part of the body of such animal or bird or reptiles or even damaging their eggs or disturbing their nests would also mean hunting.

(e) The trophy would include the whole or part of any captive wild

animal other than vermin preserved by natural or artificial means and includes rugs, skins, and specimens of such animals mounted in whole or part by taxidermy. Antler, horn hair, feather, nail, tooth musk, eggs, and the nest would also be called trophy.

(f) Specified plants refer to the plants specified under Schedule VI.

Hunting:

The Act prohibits the hunting of any wild animal under Schedule I, II, III, and IV. There are, however, certain exceptions like where the Chief Wildlife Warden is satisfied that the animal has become dangerous to human life or is diseased or disabled beyond recovery may permit the hunting by an order in writing stating the reasons. Self-defense or killing or wounding in good faith shall not be an offense. However, such an animal shall be the property of the government. On payment of prescribed fees, the Chief Wildlife Warden may grant a permit to hunt any wild animal for education, scientific research, and management (reallocation to suitable habitat/ population management without killing or poisoning or destroying wild animals), collection of species for zoos, museums and similar institutions, collection and preparation of snake venom for the manufacture of drugs. Previous permission shall be required in case of animals under Schedule I to be granted by the Central Govt. and in case of all other animals from the State Govt.

Entry with weapons is also prohibited without the previous permission of the Wildlife Warden. It is the duty of the Wildlife Warden to immunize against all communicable diseases, livestock within 5 Kms of the sanctuary. The State Govt. may also if it deems fit that an area within or outside a sanctuary is because of ecological, floral, fauna, geomorphologic, natural or zoological association or importance constitute it to be a National Park by notification.

(a) The boundaries may be altered only by a resolution of the State Legislature.

(b) Littering and arson are also prohibited. Grazing of livestock is also prohibited.

(c) The State Govt. may close for hunting any area for such period as may be specified by notification and shall be known as a closed area.

In the case of zoos, there is also a Central Zoo Authority to specify the minimum standards of housing, upkeep, and veterinary care of animals and accessing the functioning of Zoos maintaining stud-books, coordinate, acquisition, exchange and loan animals for breeding purposes, etc.

Wild animals are basically the property of the Government. In case of any person has possession of such an animal or article he may report it to the nearest police officer within 48 Hours or hand over such property to the officer-in-charge. No person shall acquire, possess, transfer, destroy or damage any such Govt. property. Certificate of ownership may be granted by the Chief Wildlife warden in case of a legal possession, which he may mark in a prescribed form for identification.

Trade or commerce in trophies, animal articles, etc. in Schedule I, Part II of Schedule II are prohibited by law. This includes the manufacture, import of Ivory, Taxidermy dealing with trophy, captive animals, or their meat. No person other than the person has been issued a certificate to keep under his control, sell, offer to sell, or transfer any animals or animal articles as above.

The Director or any other officer authorized by him or any Chief Wildlife Warden may on reasonable suspicion require inspection of any

captive animal, wild animal, meat, trophy (cured/uncured), specified plants or part thereof, or license or permits. It may also stop any vehicle to search or inquire or enter and search premises, land, vehicle, vessel, open baggage, or other possessions. In case of illegal possessions, he may also seize the illegal possession along with tools, traps, vehicles, vessels, or weapons used for the commission of the crime. An arrest without a warrant is also possible.

Officers under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 are public servants and the actions done by the officers in good faith are not punishable. Persons assisting in the detection of an offense may be rewarded up to 20% of the amount of fine imposed.

Despite the stringent provisions of the Act, the implementation of the Act is very poor. Every day newspapers reveal one or another story of the killing of animals or the trade in the skins of reptiles or the big cats.

In a recent case in Mumbai 29 python skins (*Python reticulatus*) were seized by the Deputy Director Wildlife, Northern Region, Mr. S.K. Niraj, from a leather factory in Dharavi. Three people were detained including a Dutch lady who stated that she had imported the skins from Italy with the knowledge of Customs officials. It is now believed that the skins were procured both from domestic and foreign sources. This is the fifth or sixth case in succession, with leads as far afield as the Netherlands, Italy, Singapore, and Malaysia. In an earlier case, six handbags were seized made of snakeskin (possibly keelback) that is believed to have been smuggled via Dubai from China.

A quick browse on the Internet for exotic leathers reveals thousands of sites and companies selling and manufacturing products made from

reptile skins. Exotic leather is back in fashion and taking a heavy toll on several endangered species. In many countries, the manufacture and trade of reptile articles such as coats, shoes, bags, and belts, is permitted. There are several such manufacturing units of snakeskin products in China, Thailand, and Malaysia.

In India, all trade in reptile products is prohibited under The Wild Life (Protection) Act. But a clandestine trade continues. There have been several seizures over the last two years where quantities of skins of snakes and other reptiles have been seized. In a major case in July 2002, in Bangalore, the police arrested one person and seized 35,100 snake skins (mostly rat snake and cobra) and 12 bags containing cut pieces of lizard skins. The haul was valued at Rs. one crore (US \$ 2,10,000) in the international market. The skins were allegedly brought from a village in Chittoor District in the Southern State of Andhra Pradesh. They were being taken to Chennai from where they were to be shipped to Singapore. Other large seizures have taken place in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttaranchal.

India has a long history of trade in reptiles; in 1977, a staggering four million snake skins (mostly rat snake skins) were legally exported. It is believed that the trade was so extensive that it played a major role in the huge increase in the rat population which particularly in the 1970s, decimated food grain stocks. The export of snakeskin products was finally banned in 1986, and despite energetic appeals by reptile traders and a stay order, the ban was eventually upheld on 20 March 1997. In 1999, the Indian Government publicly burnt 1,60,000 snakeskins and over 5,000 reptile skin shoes and bags in National Zoological Park, New Delhi. These stocks had been held for several years by Bharat Leather Corporation, an Indian Government enterprise dealing in the export of leather goods. Similar to the trade-in big cat skins it seems that the wheel has come round again to jeopardize the future of our snakes and other reptiles.

Actually, the fascination towards the animal's skin and the big money lying in the trade are the main reasons for such hunting and the plundering of the forests. The Law alone can't stop it fully. Unless the rich who are the main consumers of such items do not understand the futility of consuming such items unorthodox call sally aspect of killing innocent animals it can't be stopped. An awareness is necessary to protect the wildlife throughout the world.