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WILD LIFE CRIME IN INDIA: DIFFICULTIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

Shera, the official mascot of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, symbolised India's rich wildlife heritage; however, many species such as tigers and leopards are now facing severe threats due to wildlife crime. Extensive poaching and illegal trade have caused serious ecological imbalance, while the conviction rate for wildlife crimes has remained critically low, highlighting significant challenges in investigation and prosecution. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the nature and extent of wildlife crime in India. It analyses the causes and modus operandi of wildlife offences, reviews existing legislative and administrative frameworks, and identifies key constraints faced by law enforcement agencies during investigation. The study concludes by suggesting measures to strengthen investigative mechanisms and enhance the effectiveness of wildlife crime control in India.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the world's seventeen megadiverse countries and is home to approximately 7–8 per cent of the world's recorded plant and animal species, reflecting its vast ecological diversity. As of 2025, the country has developed an extensive protected area network comprising 106 National Parks and 573 Wildlife Sanctuaries, which play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2024; Wildlife Institute of India, 2025). Despite these conservation efforts, rapid urbanisation and industrialisation have led to large-scale deforestation, with forest land increasingly diverted for infrastructure development and commercial construction.

Globalisation, supported by advancements in communication and transportation technologies, has further intensified the exploitation of biological resources by integrating international markets. The rising global demand for wildlife products—such as animal skins, bones, ivory, and medicinal plants—has significantly contributed to illegal wildlife trade. Wildlife products are frequently smuggled across national borders for economic gain, undermining conservation efforts (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). The continued use of tiger bones in traditional oriental medicine outside India has been widely documented and remains a major driver of tiger poaching and illegal trade (Wildlife Protection Society of India [WPSI], n.d.).

The organised poaching of tigers for the traditional Chinese medicine industry began in northern India during the mid-1980s, when international traders targeted Indian tiger populations to supply bones, skins, and other body parts for foreign markets (WPSI, n.d.; NDTV, 2013). Investigations conducted in the early 1990s revealed the alarming scale of this trade. During 1993–94 alone, authorities seized 36 tiger skins and 667 kilograms of tiger bones in northern India, highlighting the magnitude of illegal trafficking driven by international demand (WPSI, n.d.). To meet this demand, large numbers of tigers and other wild animals were killed, and their parts smuggled primarily to Chinese and Southeast Asian markets, contributing significantly to the decline of tiger populations.

Recent cases demonstrate that wildlife crime continues to be a persistent challenge across different regions of India. In 2023, Assam witnessed a major wildlife crime case in the Jakhalabandha–Kaliabor region, where five suspects were arrested for trafficking tiger canine teeth, rhino hooves, pangolin scales, elephant ivory, and other animal parts, underscoring the prevalence of multi-species trafficking networks (ABP Live, 2023). Similarly, in west-central India, a tiger poaching syndicate operating across Maharashtra's Vidarbha and Gadchiroli districts and extending to other states was dismantled, revealing

well-organised networks involved in the long-distance movement of illegal wildlife products (Mongabay India, 2023).

In South India, sustained enforcement efforts in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu led to the arrest and conviction of six members of a nomadic gang involved in the poaching of tigers and leopards. In August 2025, the offenders were sentenced to three years of rigorous imprisonment following the seizure of a ten-foot tiger skin, skeletal remains of both tiger and leopard, and hunting equipment (New Indian Express, 2025). These cases collectively indicate that, despite an overall increase in India's tiger population, illegal poaching and wildlife trafficking remain serious threats. They also highlight the complex challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in the investigation of wildlife crime cases, forming the contextual basis for the present study.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a qualitative research design to examine the causes, modus operandi, and investigative challenges of wildlife crime in India, using a focus group–based approach to gather in-depth insights from professionals directly engaged in investigation and prosecution. Drawing on purposive sampling, the study included 32 participants—comprising criminal justice functionaries, forensic scientists, deputy forest officers, and other enforcement officials selected for their specialised expertise and practical experience, all of whom were attending advanced training programmes on Wildlife Crime and Forensic Science. Data were collected through a structured survey instrument with open-ended questions addressing the causes of wildlife crime, offender practices, and operational, procedural, and legal challenges encountered during investigations. The exclusively qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, wherein responses were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and themes related to investigative constraints, enforcement gaps, and procedural challenges, enabling the organisation of diverse professional perspectives into coherent analytical categories and enhancing the study's interpretative depth and analytical rigour.

DISCUSSION

3.1 Legislative and Administrative Measures

Importance of wild life has been recognised long back in India. Article 48A of the constitution of India[1] entrusts the duty of safeguarding forests and wild life on the state. Article 51A of the Indian Constitution has imposes duty on every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life under part IV A "Fundamental Duties"[2]. Wild Life (Protection) Act was enacted in the year 1972 (Act no 53 of 1972). By way of amending, it in the year 1991 one full chapter was added to provide protection to specified plants (Chapter IIIA)[3] under the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act 1991. Hunting of wild animals has been prohibited under Section 9[4] of the Act. Even picking, uprooting etc of specified plants has been prohibited under section 17 A[5] of the Act. (Act no 44 of 1991).

Keeping in view the critical importance of wildlife conservation in India, the Government of India launched Project Tiger on 1 April 1973 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to protect the endangered Bengal tiger and its habitats, initially covering nine tiger reserves and later expanding to cover *over 50 tiger reserves across 18 tiger-range states*, thereby safeguarding millions of hectares of forest critical for biodiversity and ecosystem health *(National Tiger Conservation Authority [NTCA], n.d.; NTCA, 2025)*. To provide statutory authority and strengthen governance for tiger conservation, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was constituted under Section 38L of the Wild Life (Protection) Act,

[1] The constitution of India, Article 48A. Protection and improvement of environment and safeguarding of forests and wild life. —The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country.

[2] The constitution of India, Article 51A Fundamental duties-..... (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures;

[3] Inserted by Act no 44 of 1991 sec.13 (w.e.f.20-4-1995 vide so 345 (E)dated 7th April 1995

[4] The wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 1991, Section-9. Prohibition of hunting.—No person shall hunt any wild animal specified in Schedules I, II, III and IV except as provided under section 11 and section 12.

[5] The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 1991, Section-17A. Prohibition of picking, uprooting, etc. of specified plant.—Save as otherwise provided in this Chapter, no person shall— (a) wilfully pick, uproot, damage, destroy, acquire or collect any specified plant from any forest land and any area specified, by notification, by the Central Government; (b) posses, sell, offer for sale, or transfer by way of gift or otherwise, or transport any specified plant, whether alive or dead, or part or derivative thereof: Provided that nothing in this section shall prevent a member of a scheduled tribe, subject to the provisions of Chapter IV, from picking, collecting or possessing in the district he resides any specified plant or part or derivative thereof for his bona fide personal use.

1972, as amended in 2006, with powers to oversee tiger reserve management, provide funding support, and ensure compliance with conservation norms *(NTCA, n.d.; NTCA, 2025)*. In recognition of the persistent threat posed by organised illegal trade and poaching of tigers and other protected species, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) was established under an amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act and officially notified on 6 June 2007, becoming operational in 2008 as a multidisciplinary statutory body mandated to collect and analyse intelligence, coordinate enforcement actions across states and agencies, and combat transboundary wildlife crime involving endangered species including tigers *(Wildlife Crime Control Bureau [WCCB], n.d.)*.

Keeping in view the increasing rate of wild crime in 2025, the Supreme Court of India prohibited tiger Safaris in core or critical tiger habitats, restricting them only to non-forest or degraded land in buffer zones as an initiative to restore the damage incurred in Jim Corbett Park which is a Tiger Reserve forest and to restore the ecological damaged caused and laid various other guideline by taking the Suo moto in the case of T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad, In Re v. Union of India[6]. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has issued directions to Centre and State Governments and other agencies to make all efforts to preserve India's wild life and take stringent actions against the cases registered under the Wild Life (Protection) Act in Sansar Chand case[7]. Yet, the crime could not be controlled.

3.2 Etiology of Wildlife Crime

3.2.1 Involvement of Organised Crime Syndicate

In the early years, involvement in wildlife crime was often driven by personal fascination or the desire to possess trophies, which were considered symbols of status and prestige. Over time, however, the financial incentives associated with the illegal trade of wildlife products transformed it into a more serious and organised criminal enterprise. Today, such crimes are frequently carried out by well-structured networks and Mafia Groups, operating systematically across regions and even Internationally, indicating a shift from opportunistic acts to highly organised wildlife trafficking for profit.(informed during Group Discussion)

3.2.2 Involvement of Local Tribal Communities

Today, Poachers are increasingly linked with organised crime syndicates and large-scale Wildlife Traders, transforming what was once opportunistic hunting into a highly structured and profitable enterprise. (informed during Group Discussion). A significant portion of poaching is carried out by local tribal communities, who possess extensive knowledge of forest terrain and animal behaviour. These hunters are often paid minimal amounts for their efforts; for instance, in May 1994, near Kanha Tiger Reserve, a trader reportedly paid four poachers only $15 each for killing a tiger *(Wildlife Protection Society of India [WPSI], n.d.)*. Their skills and expertise are systematically exploited by greedy traders and middlemen, who capture the majority of the profits from the illegal trade in tiger parts.(informed during Group Discussion).

While Sariska Tiger Reserve has successfully recovered its tiger population, reaching approximately 50 individuals by 2025, poaching threats persist. Poachers continue to operate using electric-current traps in buffer zones, and tribal tracking skills are still exploited by organised wildlife-crime networks, mirroring earlier patterns where middlemen earned far more than the hunters themselves *(Times of India, 2024; WPSI, n.d.; Times of India, 2025)*. In addition, habitat disturbance has contributed to an increase in tiger straying incidents, highlighting the ongoing risks to both local communities and wildlife, while criminal syndicates continue to profit disproportionately from these illegal activities *(Journal of Wildlife and Biodiversity, 2021)*.

3.2.3 Dependency on forest products

The Adivasis (tribal communities) largely depend on forest resources for their daily needs, and many rural populations similarly rely on forests for sustenance. For instance, Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh (located in Mandla District) is surrounded by tribal communities such as the Gonds and Baigas, many of whom are illiterate and depend on agriculture and the collection of minor forest products for their livelihoods. Their intimate knowledge of the forest, while essential for their survival, has also made some members susceptible to involvement in wildlife crimes within the reserve. Similarly, Kunno Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is bordered by the Sohariya tribes, who have been implicated in illegal hunting and trade activities in the area. In Northern India, the Bawaria tribes have historically been involved in poaching but have increasingly assumed roles as carriers and middlemen, establishing strong connections with high-profile wildlife traders and organised criminal networks. This shift

[6] (2025) 2 SCC 641.
[7] *Sansar Chand v. State of Rajasthan*, 2011 AIR SCW 372, 2010 (10) SCC 604.

demonstrates how traditional knowledge and survival strategies have been exploited by organised crime syndicates , creating complex challenges for wildlife protection and Law Enforcement. (informed during Group Discussion).

3.2.4 Geographical situation

The geographical characteristics of forests often provide an added advantage to criminals involved in wildlife crime. The dense vegetation and expansive terrain make it extremely challenging for authorities to monitor every section of the forest effectively. Criminals exploit this cover, committing illegal acts and then vanishing into the dense forest, making detection and apprehension difficult. Consequently, Law Enforcement Agencies face significant challenges in tracking, arresting, and prosecuting offenders operating within these inaccessible and rugged landscapes. (informed during Group Discussion)

3.2.5 Ignorance about Legal consequences

In many instances, it has been observed that local residents are unaware of the legal restrictions on activities such as fishing, collecting forest produce, or hunting animals for consumption within forests and protected areas. This lack of awareness and knowledge of forest laws often leads to unintentional violations, with people living in close proximity to these areas inadvertently engaging in activities that are considered offences under the law. Such situations highlight the importance of awareness programs and community education to reduce unintentional involvement in wildlife crime. (informed during Group Discussion).

In many cases, local communities residing near forests and protected areas are unaware of the legal prohibitions on activities such as fishing, collecting forest produce, or hunting wildlife for consumption. This lack of awareness and understanding of forest laws often results in unintentional violations, with residents inadvertently engaging in activities that are considered offences under the law. These situations underscore the critical need for targeted awareness campaigns and community education programs, which can help reduce accidental participation in wildlife crime while promoting sustainable and lawful use of forest resources.

3.2.6 Lack of sensitivity about wildlife crime

Judiciary and Law Enforcement Agencies often lack the necessary sensitivity and understanding to recognize the urgency of timely Apprehension, Investigation, and Disposal of Wildlife crime cases. As a result, a significant number of such cases remain pending in courts for several years, undermining the effectiveness of wildlife protection Laws. In response, the Subramanian Committee and the High Court Committee have issued a series of recommendations aimed at improving prosecution, enforcement, and judicial handling of wildlife crimes. Efforts are ongoing at both the central and state levels to implement these recommendations and strengthen the legal framework for the protection of endangered species *(Project Tiger, n.d.)*.

3.2.7 Low Conviction Rate

The success of any anti-poaching efforts ultimately depends on the rate of conviction of the poachers and smugglers involved in the illegal trade in wildlife contraband. Requisite information and database on wildlife offences is scanty. Wildlife crime detection and follow up is conducted in an ad-hoc manner by most enforcement agencies due to lack of investigation skills and infrastructure. The cases also proceed at snail's pace taking about 8-10 years before being decided. Recent data (2020–2025) show that wildlife crime in India remains high while convictions remain very low. Between 2020 and 2024, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) recorded 2,701 wildlife-crime cases nationwide, yet studies continue to estimate conviction rates at only about 1–2% due to weak investigations, poor documentation, and long trial delays. A few states with special task forces have achieved better results, yet these remain exceptions and do not reflect the national pattern of low conviction rates and slow judicial processing. (informed during Group Discussion).

3.2.8 Lacuna in existing legislation

Due to lack of effective legislation and unified sentencing policy cases are ending into acquittal (informed during Group Discussion). Large numbers of cases dealing with wildlife crime continue to remain pending over long periods; even those that get decided do little to deter offenders, as often punishment awarded is meagre. Slow rate of conviction lead to accused getting easy exemption from appearances leading to prolong the evidence stage. Insufficient or badly presented evidence often coupled with non-availability of witnesses, frivolous appeals and interim order stall most of the case in trial courts (informed during Group Discussion). As a result, crimes have been repeatedly committed.

3.3 Modus Operandi (Modalities for committing crime).

Criminals have been using various complicated methods to kill animals in connivance with Mafias.

3.3.1 In many cases it has been found that criminals have been killing animals by way of mixing poison in carcasses of domestic buffaloes and cows. During the dry, hot summer months small forest pools are also poisoned by poachers. Sophisticated and well-organised supply route operated by major wildlife-trade networks continues to distribute poison and collect tiger bones even from the most remote villages, using local Intermediaries and covert transport chains. Criminal Networks have adapted to modern system by using digital payments, encrypted communication, and interstate linkages to move tiger skins and bones from central Indian forests toward International smuggling corridors near India's eastern borders (informed during Group Discussion). Poached tigers are often butchered, skinned, and their bones prepared for export, indicating the continued operation of an organised trafficking chain. Despite periodic arrests and seizures, Enforcement Agencies report that the trade has only become more clandestine, with fewer middlemen, mobile poaching gangs, and increasingly sophisticated logistics making detection and prosecution extremely difficult (Skin and Bones, 2022).

3.3.2 Sometimes poachers put steel traps in forest where animals come. Animals are trapped in it and killed. The iron traps capture tiger or leopard. During the year 2004-05 it was observed that they were using dismantled iron traps during transportation to avoid its identification and detection by the enforcing agencies (Wildlife Protection Society India, 2004) the traps have a circular ring tied with iron chain, two semicircular rings attached to the iron base ring and two inverted v shaped solid plates which act as sprints. A wooden piece is tied with iron chain at the end of the chain to securely bind the trap to the ground (informed during Group Discussion). These traps are made of nomadic blacksmiths. These traps are immensely strong. Even ordinary villagers passing through the area may get injured due to trap. These traps are supplied by big Mafias to the local criminals, who usually get meagre amount as his share. (www.wpsi-india.org)

3.3.3 At Sariska Tiger Reserve Poachers were found to use thick rope to trap animals. They used to get first acquainted themselves about the spot where animals usually come to take water. Then they used to put the rope and animals got trapped. (Informed during Group Discussion).

3.3.4 Criminals have been using firearms in forests where hunting may be carried out with little hindrances. Use of Firearm is done by poachers with lot of caution and care and in remote forest. After killing animals offenders take the skin and carcass with them. They are dangerous. In many cases it has been found that Forest guards were killed /injured by the criminals while they try to apprehend the offender in dense forest (informed during Group Discussion)

3.3.5 By tapping 230 volts – 11 KV overhead electrical wires and laying a live wire on animal tracts is one of the methods used by criminals to kill tigers. This method has been commonly used to kill tigers with the connivance of local people as they are aware about the geographical situation as well as roots used by animals. (informed during Group Discussion)

3.4 Constraints in investigation

3.4.1 Delay in getting information about crime by Forest Officials

Due to the dense forest cover and limited human presence in protected areas, information about poaching or other wildlife offences often reaches the concerned officials with significant delays. Even after receiving such information, it frequently takes considerable time for Forest Guards or Investigating Agencies to reach the crime scene, particularly in remote or inaccessible locations. These delays often result in the destruction or loss of critical evidence, making it extremely difficult for authorities to identify and apprehend the actual perpetrators. Consequently, the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement is severely compromised, highlighting the need for improved communication systems, rapid response mechanisms, and better patrolling strategies within protected areas.

3.4.2 Lack of training

Many forest officials lack adequate training and practical knowledge of investigation procedures, including evidence handling, recording statements, and maintaining chain-of-custody, which weakens prosecution. The police is empowered to Investigate Wildlife Offences under Section 50 of the Act (Act no 18 0f 2023)[8], but coordination between Police and Forest Departments remains inconsistent. Some states have introduced updated Rules and standardised forms to improve documentation and procedural compliance, yet adoption and training remain uneven across India. As a result, despite the legal powers

[8] The Wild life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, (No. 18 of 2023), Section 50. Power of entry, search, arrest and detention.—(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, the Director or any other officer authorised by him in this behalf or the Chief Wild Life Warden or the authorised officer or any forest officer or any police officer not below the rank of a sub- inspector, may, if he has reasonable grounds for believing that any person has committed an offence against this Act,—-----SS 3,4,5,6,7,8,9.

available, investigation quality In many states they are following the procedure prescribed under the state forest manual. (informed during Group Discussion)

3.4.3 Inappropriate Quantum of punishment

Under section 51 of Wild Life Protection Act, there is no classification of quantum of punishment. Any violations of the Act carry a maximum sentence of three years imprisonment, a fine of up to ₺25,000, or both. This includes license violations, unlawful hunting, and illegal commerce. In addition to this offenses involving Schedule I or II species, hunting in sanctuaries or national parks have a minimum sentence of three years and a maximum sentence of seven years. In addition to imprisonment or a fine, the court may order the confiscation of any animals, animal products, tools, cars, or weapons used in the offense; cancel any licenses barring the offender from possessing one for five years[9]. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023(BNS) Section 291 deals with the "negligent conduct with respect to animal" in which the punishment conferred for such offence is imprisonment for a certain period which might extend till 6 months or with fine up to five thousand Rupees or in some cases court may impose both[10]. Section 325 of BNS deals with offences including killing, maiming or rendering any animal. The offender will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to five years, fine or both[11]. The Biological Diversity Act, 2002 [Act no. 18 of 2003], emphasize the conservation of biodiversity and prohibit commercial exploitation of biological resources without permission, under Chapter XII Section 55 to Section 59 which provides that the violators are subject to fines ranging from ₺50,000 to ₺1,00,000 and imprisonment up to three years, depending on the offence. Collectively, these Laws aim to provide both punitive and deterrent measures to curb poaching, trafficking, and illegal trade, while also promoting sustainable use of biological resources and conservation of endangered species. It is not commensurate to the type of crime committed and person involved. On one hand a tribal might be accused of petty crime and is unable to pay such hefty fine, whereas on other hand the party involved might be a business man accused of poaching/illegal wildlife trade who would pay the fine easily and might continue his lucrative illegal trade with the help of local people. This patronage of big Mafias makes the job of investigator difficult and complicated. (informed during Group Discussion)

3.4.4 Inappropriate crime scene documentation

Forest Officials are not well trained about crime scene documentation. Facts mentioned in Primary Offence Report, Seizure Memo, Search Memo and Arrest Memo etc. differ due to ignorance or lack of knowledge among forest officials. As a result, cases end up into acquittal because defence lawyer take the advantage of lacuna in crime scene documentation. (informed during Group Discussion).

3.4.5 Lack of Infrastructure

In forest protected area is divided into zones and each zone is divided into circles, each circle into ranges and each range in to beats. There are insufficient number of forest guards are at one beat. They are not provided with proper weapons and infrastructure. On the other hand, criminals these days have guns and other weapons to kill animals. Therefore, forest guards find it difficult to monitor dense forest area without appropriate arms and means for transportation. (informed during Group Discussion).

3.4.6 Lack of cooperation

During search and seizure forest officials find it difficult to carry operations as family members including women and children of suspects do not cooperate. Family members of suspect threat forest officials to file a complaint against them under relevant provision of Law. In many cases even forest officials are not able to seek help of police due to police being overburdened with their own responsibilities of investigation relating to human crime and maintenance of Law and order (informed during Group Discussion).

3.4.7 Lack of independent witnesses

[9] The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act 2022, [Act no 18 of 2022] 51. Penalties.—(1) Any person who 1 [contravenes any provision of this Act 2 [(except Chapter VA and section 38J)]]or any rule or order made thereunder or who commits a breach of any of the conditions of any licence or permit granted under this Act, shall be guilty of an offence against this Act, and shall, on conviction, be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 [three years], or with fine which may extend to 4 [twenty-five thousand rupees], or with both:--------SS; 1(A)(B), 2,3,4,5.

[10] The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023,(Act no 45 of 2023), Section 291: Negligent conduct with respect to animals- Whoever knowingly or negligently omits to take such measures with any animal in his possession as is sufficient to guard against any probable danger to human life, or any probable danger of grievous hurt from such animal, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees, or with both.

[11] The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023,(Act no 45 of 2023), Section 326: Mischief by killing or maiming animal- Whoever commits mischief by killing, poisoning, maiming or rendering useless any animal shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both.

Due to its Geographical situation, it is difficult to find independent witnesses in wild life crime cases except at the time of seizure, if it is done from the house of accused. During trial defence lawyers take the advantage of it and cases end into acquittal. In WLI v. Sandeep[12] High Court of Delhi acquitted the accused who was charged for illegal possession of the animal skin and been registered under relevant Sections 39, 44, 49 and 51 of WPA, the reason for the acquittal was lack of witnesses, absence of independent public witnesses, inconsistency in prosecution and failure to scientifically identify the seized items. There is need for more surveillance in the regions where such illegal act takes place.

3.4.8 Insufficient Forensic Aid

In trial relating to Wildlife Crime cases identification of the Caracas of dead animal is one of the important factors. That has to be certified by Forensic Scientists. Due to lack of wild life forensic laboratories in every state, it becomes time consuming and difficult to get the report within stipulated time. Due to this, cases end into acquittal even though it is apparent from the dead body which particular animal was killed. Forest Officials are not accompanied by Forensic Expert like police to crime scene. Forest officials themselves lift the evidences from the scene of crime. Although they are provided training in identifying and lifting of evidences but such trainings are of very basic nature and does not serve the purpose as intended. Sometimes Forest Officers unknowingly ends up in damaging, destroying or overlooking the evidences. (informed during Group Discussion).

CONCLUSION

Wildlife conservation in India is supported by a robust constitutional, legislative, administrative, and judicial framework. The Constitution of India, through Articles 48A and 51A(g), places responsibility on both the State and citizens to protect wildlife. Statutory measures such as the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, along with subsequent amendments, the establishment of Project Tiger, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, reflect the seriousness with which wildlife protection has been addressed. Judicial interventions by the Supreme Court, including restrictions on tiger safaris and strict directions in landmark cases, further demonstrate the commitment of the judiciary to ecological preservation.

Despite these extensive legal and institutional mechanisms, wildlife crime continues to pose a serious threat. The study reveals that wildlife crime has evolved from isolated acts of hunting into a sophisticated, organized, and transnational criminal enterprise. The involvement of organized crime syndicates, exploitation of local tribal communities, dependence on forest resources, challenging geographical conditions, lack of legal awareness, and inadequate sensitivity among enforcement agencies and the judiciary collectively contribute to the persistence of wildlife crime.

The analysis also highlights significant shortcomings in investigation and prosecution. Low conviction rates, procedural lapses, inadequate forensic support, poor crime-scene documentation, lack of trained manpower, insufficient infrastructure, and absence of independent witnesses have weakened the deterrent effect of wildlife laws. Further, lacunae in existing legislation, including absence of a unified sentencing policy and disproportionate punishment, have resulted in frequent acquittals and repeat offences. Consequently, although India possesses comprehensive wildlife protection laws, ineffective implementation and enforcement continue to undermine conservation efforts.

SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Due to delayed information about crime, evidence gets destroyed. It is therefore suggested that number of forest Guards should be increased. There should be proper mechanism to monitor every beat in forest.

5.2 The word investigation is not used in the WPA. Due to lack of clear-cut provision of investigation under section 50 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1957. Investigation in wild life crime cases are not done properly. It is therefore suggested that section 50 of the Act should be amended and power of investigation should be given to appropriate authority. Accordingly, provisions should also be incorporated by way of amendment in the existing Rules.

5.3 Forensic Aid to wild life crime investigation is not provided properly to forest officials. It is suggested that forest department should seek co-operation from Forensic expert at the time of lifting evidence. Wildlife DNA data base should be made available at every State Forensic Science Laboratory so that report from Forensic Science Laboratories may be received well in time during trial of the case.

[12] *WLI v. Sandeep*, CC No. 61/ 1

5.4 Due to lack of knowledge about importance of wild life crime and pressure of work police is not able to accompany Forest Officials in Investigation process especially during search seizure and arrest. Police and judiciary should be sensitized about the importance of wild life and its contribution in maintaining ecological balance. They should be provided training at regular intervals.
5.5 Due to lack of procedural knowledge about investigation cases are ending into acquittal. Forest officials should be provided training about the procedure of investigation, importance of crime scene documentation, packaging, lifting & forwarding of evidence after every three months. Senior officers should take initiative in this regard.
5.6 The penal provisions should be strictly enforced.
5.7 Due to lack of infrastructure officials are not able to monitor forest beats properly. Appropriate infrastructure should be provided to the forest officials who are deployed in field duty with arms and ammunition and they should be exempted under the Arms Act in parallel with police.
5.8 Due to lack of independent witnesses' cases have been ending into acquittal. Judiciary should be sensitised about the difficulty of getting independent witnesses in forest due to non-availability of human being. Testimony of Forest officials should be made admissible in the cases related to Wild Life committed inside the protected area.

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