WILD LIFE PRESERVATION IN INDIA

Annual Report for 1953 on the Western Region

By

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A brief summary of the wild life situation within my region is necessary. The position of wild life exclusive of game species appears to be satisfactory. Big game species on the whole, are on the decrease, and certain species such as Lion, Blackbuck, Chinkara, Swamp Deer, and perhaps Sambar with their respective habitats require special protection. The Crocodiles (two species—*palustris* and *Gavialis gangeticus*) are definitely diminishing in numbers and therefore need discreet protection. Small game in general, is not yet seriously affected; in some States it is on the increase. But the Great Indian Bustard (*Choriotis nigriceps*) and Jungle-fowls (red and grey), require careful preservation.

The formation of State Wild Life Advisory Boards has had a beneficial effect on the general public and State Departments all over, and has done much to save the wild life of Western India. The Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Acts in the States of Bombay and Saurashtra are certainly welcome and there is a growing sympathy by the people towards the preservation of wild life, in the two States. However, ‘Touring Wild Life Committees’ are essential to estimate and evaluate wild life populations ‘on the spot’. Schemes for National Parks are rapidly gaining strength. ‘Protected Areas’ for wild life are being established. More attention is being given to Sanctuaries.

Fish life during drought years have suffered heavily in some States, but fish depletion in the larger rivers has not taken place. The freshwater fish industry needs special attention.

This report has been prepared from information received from various States, and includes a rapid survey of the Gir Forest in Saurashtra, the home of the Indian Lion.

The Indian Board for Wild Life at its Mysore Conference of November 1952, prepared excellent recommendations for the Government of India, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, so that the Government of India could assist all States to protect their diminishing

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1 The Western Region covers the following States: Bombay, Saurashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat, Madhya Pradesh, Vindhya Pradesh, Bhopal, Ajmer and Kutch.
wild life assets. And also, the Government of India wrote to all State Governments advising them to set up Wild Life Advisory Boards. My reminder dated 5-2-1954 to all States in the Western Zone, emphasized the need to set up these Boards early. The following States responded: Bombay, Saurashtra and Madhya Bharat.

The Saurashtra State, in particular, has made rapid progress and has held two meetings of the State Wild Life advisory Board, on 30-10-1953 and 5-1-1954. At the second meeting, some very critical recommendations to improve the existing Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1952, which was in truth, a copy of the Bombay Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1951, were made, according to local conditions and needs. The following were the principal resolutions1 passed by the State Board, most of which were accepted by the State Government.

1 Creation of a National Park in the Gir Forest to protect the Indian Lion and other game species.
2 Amendments to the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1952.
3 Complete protection of certain wild life species and the establishment of 'Protected Areas'.
4 Enforcement of the Saurashtra Wild Life Act.
5 Publicity for wild life preservation.
6 'Close Seasons'.
7 Honorary Game Wardens.

On the whole the setting up of State Wild Life Advisory Boards has been quite a slow process except for States such as Bombay and Saurashtra. It is a pity that the remaining States have not fallen in line. However, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Vindhya Pradesh are preparing to do so.

The following States have suitable Wild Life Acts: Bombay, Saurashtra, Bhopal and Madhya Bharat. Rajasthan, Vindhya Pradesh and a few others have prepared or are preparing Bills for the same. The progress is slow.

Position of Wild Life

The position of wild life within the region cannot be accurately estimated without a proper survey. Replies received to my circular letter inquiring of the position of wild life from the States are favourable except for the big game population. In general, it appears that big game is not in abundance anywhere and that reduction of game species continues.

Bombay: The wild life of the State is well protected and has commenced to increase. A Wild Life Preservation Officer is appointed by the State Government to look after the affairs of preservation of wild life in the State.

1 Almost all the resolutions were moved by K. S. Dharmakumarsinhji as the representative of the Inspector-General of Forests, Central Government.
**Saurashtra:** The Victoria Park at Bhavnagar, which has been a ‘Peoples Park’ for over 60 years, contains a variety of wild life such as, Blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), Cheetal (*Axis axis*), Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Wild Pig (*Sus cristatus*) and small game, apart from the variety of bird life. The Forest Department has started to care for wild life preservation within the Park limits. A census taken by me of the big game resulted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nilgai</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackbuck</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Pig</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheetal</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>140 heads</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The area consists of thorny scrub and is about 6 square miles. Formerly, it used to contain species like, Chinkara (*Gazella bennettii*), Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*) and Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*). The Spur-fowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) was successfully introduced in the past.

The Divisional Forest Officer’s report from Jamnagar states that game species are increasing in the Gir Forest and Barda Hills and decreasing in other parts of Saurashtra. My rapid survey of wild life of the Gir Forest between 1st April and 15th April, failed to reveal game in abundance, while actually some species were found in small numbers and are obviously reduced.

The Indian lion is one of the most important animal species in Asia today, the preservation of which has drawn the attention of the International Union for the Protection of Nature. My report of 1949 to the Union referred to this problem. The Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*) formerly ranged throughout the Middle East and northern India. Today, it is restricted to the Gir Forest in Saurashtra and Bombay (Amreli District—formerly Baroda territory). The Saurashtra Government has given protection to the animal by order Notification No. DP/F/III/7/157 dated 25th July 1953 and by Section 16 of the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1952; and the Bombay State has given the lion complete protection. The lion census made by Mr. M. A. Wynter-Blyth in 1950 on behalf of the Saurashtra Government revealed between 219 to 227 lions (adult and young inclusive) with a maximum of 250 lions in the whole of the Gir Forest. The killing of lions is carefully controlled by the Rajpramukh of Saurashtra and the limit of four lions to be shot per annum has been laid down as a general policy. This seems to be reasonable in spite of the fact that lions may increase rapidly if given proper protection. The State Wild Life Board, at its second meeting recommended 3 lions and 3 lionesses to be shot as maximum for the whole year. However, lions have been ordered to be destroyed for cattle-lifting from time to time and it is unfortunate that a number have been thus killed. Moreover, an accurate record of lions destroyed or found dead has not been kept by the Forest Department. It appears that a good number of lions have been destroyed in a clandestine manner. Actually, I feel that on no account should lions
be killed for cattle-lifting since most lions in the Gir Forest, at one time or another, feed upon cattle owing to the density of livestock within the Forest. It is deplorable that records of game killed in the Gir Forest, as well as in areas in some other States, have not been accurately maintained, and in a few are even completely wanting. My recent survey of the Gir Forest revealed that game had been indiscriminately shot, especially Cheetal, Wild Boar, and Sambar, while Chousingha and Nilgai were holding their own in fair numbers, though not in abundance. It is unfortunate that the wild life of the Gir area has not had the rigid protection as made known officially in spite of the importance of the lion. The Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*) appears now to be extinct. The Green Pigeon (*Crotopus phoenicophterus*) may have the same fate due to carelessness if not well protected, for the feathers are sought for the same medicinal purpose as those of the Grey Hornbill. During my rapid survey, firing was heard within the Gir Forest and animal life was seen to flee at the approach of motor vehicles. This behaviour of game species discloses indiscriminate shooting from motor vehicles in contravention of Section 17 of the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1952. The State Government has appointed a Wild Life Officer for the Gir with a small staff. This so-called Wild Life Department enjoys a reputation of supplying shikar to some sportsmen only. The present set-up is wholly unsatisfactory since poaching is rampant, mostly by forest contractors and their workmen. The Forest Department is ignorant of how to manage wild life in the Gir. The sooner a National Park is formed in the Gir, the better it will be in the interest of the lion. The lion’s natural food is slowly decreasing, and unless firm steps are taken to prevent the killing of game species which supply its food, a crisis is inevitable. The State Government should keep a proper record of the lions and game killed or found dead, and this information should be passed on to the Regional Secretary for Wild Life regularly every month.

The present question of controlling the maldharies—livestock owners—in the Gir Forest is under the consideration of the Saurashtra Government. The Forest Minister, Shri Dayashanker Dave, and Shrimati Pushpaben Mehta (who is appointed on a special committee to study this problem) have taken special interest in the plan for the rehabilitation of maldharies. This is, I believe, an excellent plan, for it will seclude maldharies and afford them greater safety from the lion, and also give the lion and its habitat rest and relief. Incidentally, the State Government is also planning to have a National Park in the Gir. The advice of the Regional Secretary has been invited in this connection, and a suggestion to set aside at least 350 square miles of forest land for a National Park has been made. This will allow sufficient areas free for cattle grazing and afford Buffer or Preservation zones for the benefit of sportsmen.

*Grassland Habitat:* Grassland without mixed deciduous forest canopy comprises ideal habitat for Nilgai, Blackbuck, Chinkara,
Bustard and small game. The grass and bushy cover supply them with food and shelter. Since the tendency to plough grasslands has grown, and owing to the encroachment of livestock upon grassland, the above species and their habitat are threatened. Again, owing to the ease with which these 'lowland' game animals are killed, they are decreasing at an alarming rate, in spite of the existing laws and regulations giving them protection.

It is evident that game species such as Blackbuck and Chinkara have been reduced to danger point in Saurashtra State. And this may well apply also to other States within the zone. It means that unless these species are given adequate protection, they are open to the hazards of extirpation. As for forest land, the game within is comparatively less reduced but is nowhere in abundance. In my report of the rapid survey of wild life and game, 1950, in the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat, and Saurashtra, which are now within my region, I had emphasized upon the need for protecting wild life and game and left no stone unturned in advising and supplying the States with useful information on National Parks, Sanctuaries, Wild Life Boards and Wild Life Department, etc., etc. Since then very little progress has been made, apart from what has been done by the Bombay and Saurashtra States. It is unfortunate that the Rajpramukhs and their Governments have neglected the subject of Wild Life Preservation.

**Rajasthan:** The Keoladeo Ghana at Bharatpur, proposed as a National Bird Sanctuary, was completely neglected, until a special directive from our Prime Minister Shri Nehru was sent. It is now hoped, that during the coming season the nesting of water birds and wintering of migratory wildfowl will be a success. This is a place which will attract bird-lovers from all over the world.

Siraska in Alwar, Sawai Madhopur in Jaipur, Jayasamand in Udaipur and certain areas close to the Chambal in Kotah, should be carefully re-surveyed for future wild life projects. Crocodiles in the rivers of Rajasthan have been depleted and so require special protection. The Ban-Bihar Game Preserve at Dholpur is a place where wild animals can be seen at close quarters.

**Madhya Bharat:** The State has excellent Sanctuaries; Shivpuri, Barwaha, and Bhanpura. Game species like, Tiger, Leopard, Sambar, Cheetal, Four-horned Antelope and Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*), can be seen at their best in these areas. The Madhya Bharat Wild Life Act is excellent and enforcement of the same is being carried out in the normal way. Honorary game wardens should be appointed in large numbers for the whole of the State, if game preservation is to be effective. A report from the Chief Conservator of Forests indicates, that wild life is being adequately protected and yet poaching by persons in motor cars takes place sufficiently to affect the wild life population. It is indeed alarming to receive reports of this nature, especially when the Forest Department itself admits that the wild life on the whole is decreasing. Consequently, immediate steps should be taken to lessen poaching by motorists.
The record of big game shot per annum during the last three years in the State, furnished by the Forest Department, is given below:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern Circle</th>
<th>1951-2</th>
<th>1952-3</th>
<th>1953-4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gwalior Div.</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sheopur</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shivpuri</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Guna</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Southern Circle</th>
<th>1951-2</th>
<th>1952-3</th>
<th>1953-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Nemawar Div.</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dhar</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Nimad</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Indore</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Total ... 93 45 118

Strangely enough the above report does not give the names of species killed!

**Madhya Pradesh:** The wild life of Madhya Pradesh is unique and the State contains the following important large game species. Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Swamp Deer (*Rucervus duvaucelli*), Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), Gaur (*Bibos gaurus*), Cheetal (*Axis axis*), Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*), Blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), Chinkara (*Gazella bennetti*), Chousingha (*Tetraceros quadricornis*), Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjac*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*). The Forest Department is taking keen interest in preserving these animals. The meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life held at Kanha, Banjar Game Reserve last October (1953) had a great stimulating effect on the people and the State Forest Department, and the presence of the Union Minister, Dr. Punjabrao Deshmukh, and State Forest Minister at the meeting was cordially welcomed. Future National Parks are being planned. Areas in the old Bastar State have great wild life potential. The best areas are in fact Nature Reserves which could be turned into National Parks or Sanctuaries where historical places and the wild life characteristic of the State could be viewed in almost luxury.

**Vindhya Pradesh:** The State has preserved much of its wild life in spite of the need for scientific wild life management. Reports indicate that there are no special problems affecting wild life. The State Wild Life Board is being set up.

**Ajmer:** The position of wild life preservation in the State is unsatisfactory and a special inquiry committee should be appointed immediately to go into the matter.

**Kutch:** The vast dry area of Kutch lends itself ideally for wild life preservation, though game species are on the decrease at present owing to military occupation and general lack of interest. Special
measures to protect the Great Indian Bustard (*Choriotis nigriceps*) should be taken.

Kutch is famous for the breeding place of the Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber antiquorum*) the only place where these birds are found nesting in India. Because of the inaccessibility of the site of the breeding colony, the species is well protected naturally. Any special measures to afford the nesting area greater protection by artificial means would probably endanger the birds’ breeding. Flamingo prefer complete seclusion from human interference and this is what they already have in Kutch. Kutch also contains the Onager or Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus khur*). These animals are found in fairly large numbers and their range reaches the borders of Northern Saurashtra. At present, the species is well protected.

**Bhopal:** The Bhopal State has been fortunate in having proper regulations governing its wild life policy. I am glad to state that, the game preserves there, seem to be well managed on the whole, although, game of the larger kinds may not be as numerous as in the past. The preservation and shooting of wild life in Bhopal is regulated under the Bhopal Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act No. 311 of 1930 and various notifications issued thereunder and the revised shooting rules of 1951.

In all respects, Bhopal offers good shooting to sportsmen with camera or rifle, as it contains almost all game species, both large and small, such as are usually found on the Malwa Plateau. The total area of Reserved Forest is about 1,254 square miles, which is divided into two divisions, Eastern and Western, with areas of 657 and 597 square miles respectively.

**Assessment of the Effectiveness of Existing Legislation**

Bombay and Saurashtra have, as mentioned earlier, made their own Wild Life Acts known as the Bombay Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1951 and the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act XXXII of 1952. The Saurashtra Act has been amended as advised by the State Wild Life Advisory Board. This will make the Act one of the best in India. The State Board in its second meeting have recommended ‘Protected Areas’ for saving Chinkara and Blackbuck especially, and each district will have two such areas each for the safety of the species. The Grey Hornbill has been declared a protected bird; but I fear that this measure is too late. The same might be said in the case of the Great Indian Bustard; however, some birds are still to be seen. In the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Act, the word ‘Natural’ (Kill) in Section 17 has been removed; and certain Sections irrelevant to local conditions have also been eliminated, e.g., 41, 42, 43 as they refer to ivory of Elephants. Moreover, Sloth Bears, Tigers and Barking Deer have been deleted from Schedule No. II and III, as these animals are not found in Saurashtra. The Act is excellent but the enforcement appears to be lacking. There are no restrictions on the movements of nomadic tribes, who cause havoc to wild life. However, it is gratifying to state that
partridges and resident waterfowl are on the increase, while the hare is definitely on the decrease. Strict measures by the Bombay State are being enforced by the Wild Life Preservation Officer and poaching of game species is being checked. Co-operation by Honorary Game Wardens is forthcoming. In order that the law be enforced effectively, State departments such as Police, Forest and Revenue should take a keener interest in seeing that regulations like Close Season, etc., are observed. The Military, particularly, are the greatest offenders of shooting regulations and certain areas of wild life abundance have been completely ruined by them.

If any Wild Life Act is to be effective, the magistrates and judicial councillors should fully understand and realise the importance of wild life as a National Asset and law-breakers should be heavily punished. From information gathered from various States, it appears that there is not enough co-operation from State Departments or from the public for stamping out indiscriminate killing of game and for enforcing the existing laws pertaining to wild life protection. In view of this, it can be said that in most States game, on the whole, is decreasing in spite of legislation and rules and regulations prohibiting unlawful killing of wild life. In the Saurashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act, 1952, Section 50 (1) reads as follows:

'Defence of life and property. Subject to the provisions of Sections 38 to 40 (both inclusive) nothing in this Act shall prohibit the killing or capturing of any wild animal or wild bird by the occupier of any land in defence of the standing crops or cattle on the land.'

Many lions are shot and wounded under this Section of which little is known. There is no doubt that exception should be made in the case of rare animal life, such as the Indian lion, if the species is to be saved.

Sanctuaries in the States have not been effectively managed and wild life is being killed at a rapid rate. It is therefore, of vital importance that the Government of India should nominate Committees consisting of experts to tour all States to see for themselves the position of wild life population and then advise the States on how to manage their wild life resources. These Touring Committees would organise, where necessary, 'Game Censuses', so as to estimate the density of game population. I strongly emphasize the importance of having Touring Committees, which may actually see or investigate on the spot how wild life is managed, and whether it is given the necessary protection or not.

In Saurashtra, by individual effort a series of 16 mm. colour films depicting wild life in natural surroundings have been produced to inculcate interest in the public towards wild life preservation.

In spite of repeated warnings of wild life depletion the progress made for protecting game species has been painfully slow, and in some cases much too late. However, if even now other States were to follow in the footsteps of Bombay and Saurashtra, they would gain considerably in protecting their wild life before it vanishes completely. I have come to the conclusion that, it is essential for the States to inaugurate 'Protected Areas' where Sanctuaries in the
strict sense, cannot be established, as early as possible and, with the aid of the Central Government, create National Parks immediately.

In the interests of State Governments to ensure that their wild life is adequately protected and that areas of Sanctuaries or Preserves are being managed satisfactorily, I even suggest District Wild Life Committees, consisting of the following persons: Collector, District Superintendent of Police, Divisional Forest Officer and one unofficial Honorary Game Warden. This team could tour important areas together and assess the wild life population of the district, from time to time. There is no doubt that this sort of committee would create much interest in the public as well as gain knowledge of local wild life conditions. So far, much of the effective steps to protect wild life have been taken on paper and few persons really know the actual position of game and wild life population in the States. If this is to be achieved, then, the answer I believe is in forming ‘Touring Wild Life Committees’ appointed by the States and by the centre.