

AMEND THE WILDLIFE (PROTECTION) ACT, KERALA: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Kerala seeks Centre's nod to kill problematic wild animals straying into human habitations

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Kerala has sought amendments to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to enable quicker culling of dangerous wild animals and declaration of wild boars as vermin, amid rising human-wildlife conflict. The move raises ecological, ethical, and data-driven concerns.

Context

- The **Kerala government** has urged the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** to amend the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA)**.
- The aim is to allow the state to **kill or manage wild animals** that stray into human habitats and pose a threat.

Kerala's Demands to the Union Government

Amendment to WLPA, 1972

- Kerala seeks an amendment to allow the **culling of "man-eating" or dangerous wild animals**.
- The goal is to remove **excessive procedural delays** currently involved in dealing with such animals.

Declaration of Wild Boars as Vermin

- The state requests that **wild boars** be declared as **vermin under Section 62 of the Act**.
- This would permit their **hunting in designated areas** for a limited period to control their population.

Removal of Bonnet Macaques from Schedule I

- Kerala seeks the removal of **bonnet macaques** from **Schedule I** of the Act.
- This would allow **direct action** by wildlife authorities, such as capture and relocation, without cumbersome legal hurdles.

Reasons for Increase in Human-Wildlife Conflict

Degraded Habitats

- **Deforestation**, developmental activities, and agricultural expansion have led to **shrinking and fragmented wildlife habitats**.
- This forces animals to venture into **human settlements**.

Rise in Certain Animal Populations

- Populations of **wild pigs** and **bonnet macaques** have increased significantly.
- Their growing numbers have worsened **human-wildlife conflicts**.

Human Activities

- Practices like **grazing of cattle in forest areas** and changes in cropping patterns attract wild animals to **farm lands**.
- This increases the frequency of encounters between **humans and wildlife**.

Ecological Imbalances

- Decline in **top predator species** due to past hunting policies has led to **unnatural increases in herbivorous species**.
- The absence of natural population control further **exacerbates conflict**.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

Schedules of the WLPA

- The Act contains **six schedules**, each offering different levels of protection to various species:
 - **Schedule I & II**: Provide **the highest level of protection** to species like tigers, elephants, etc.
 - Offences against these species attract the most **stringent penalties**.
 - **Schedule V**: Lists species classified as '**vermin**' (e.g., common crows, fruit bats, rats, mice).
 - These species can be **hunted without restriction**.

Procedure to Declare an Animal as Vermin

State Government's Request

- A **state government** can submit a request to the **Central Government** to declare a wild animal as vermin.
- Grounds include significant **property damage, crop loss**, or threats to **human life or livestock**.

Central Government Notification

- The Central Government can issue a **notification** to declare a wild animal (excluding those in Schedule I and Part II of Schedule II) as vermin.
- The declaration applies for a **specific area** and a **specific time period**.

Loss of Protection

- Once declared vermin, the animal **loses its protection** under the Wildlife (Protection) Act.
- The species can then be **culled or hunted** without legal penalty during the notified period.

Concerns Regarding Such Measures

Ecological Disruption

- **Mass culling** can create a **vacuum in the food chain**.
- This disrupts the **predator-prey balance** and may lead to unforeseen ecological consequences.

Risk to Non-Target Species

- Traps set for wild boars have unintentionally caught **tigers** and **leopards** in states like Karnataka.
- Such incidents highlight the **risk to endangered or protected species**.

Lack of Data

- Many decisions to declare vermin or allow culling are made without **comprehensive data**.
- There is often insufficient information about:
 - **Species population**.
 - **Extent of crop damage**.
 - **Conflict hotspots**.

Ethical Concerns

Sanctity of Animal Life

- **Mass or unjustified culling** raises moral concerns about the **right to life** of wild animals.
- The **ethical responsibility** to protect wildlife is undermined.

Species Discrimination

- Labelling certain animals as '**vermin**' can result in their **systematic extermination**.
- Such actions are often driven by **human convenience**, not **ecological necessity**.

Welfare Violations

- The use of **lethal traps** and **inhumane killing methods** often causes **unnecessary suffering**.
- Both **target** and **non-target species** can be subjected to pain and distress during such operations.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/kerala-seeks-centres-nod-to-kill-problematic-wild-animals-straying-into-human-habitations/article69671851.ece#:~:text=The%20>