

2. Wildlife Crime in India- Environment

1. Background

Definition of Wildlife Crime

Wildlife crime refers to illegal activities involving wild fauna and flora. This includes –

Poaching – The illegal hunting, killing, or capturing of protected species.

Trafficking – The unauthorized transport and trade of wildlife products or live animals.

Possession – Holding wildlife or their derivatives (horns, skins, etc.) without legal permits.

Illegal Trade – Commercial transactions involving protected species for traditional medicine, pets, or luxury goods.

The Punjab Context

Punjab is often overlooked in wildlife conservation discussions due to its low forest cover (under 3.6%). However, a recent study by researchers from Lovely Professional University, published in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, reveals that the state's geographical position makes it a critical area for both local poaching and international trafficking.

2. Key Findings – Wildlife Crime in Punjab (2019–2024)

The study identified Punjab as a significant landscape for wildlife exploitation despite its limited green cover.

Statistical Snapshot

Incident Count – 32 major wildlife crime incidents were documented between 2019 and 2024.

Impact – These incidents affected thousands of animals, including several endangered species.

Hotspot Analysis – 1% of the State (509 sq km) – Identified as "extreme-intensity" crime hotspots.

1. 30% of the State – Falls within "low-to-moderate intensity" zones.

Targeted Species and Networks

Most Targeted – Wild Boars are the most frequently poached animals, primarily driven by the bushmeat trade and illegal transport networks. One seizure alone accounted for 127 individuals.

Diverse Fauna – Other targets include leopards, tigers, sambars, freshwater turtles, and even marine species.

International Links – The seizure of 201 Shahtoosh shawls indicates the killing of hundreds of Tibetan Antelopes (found in Ladakh and China), exposing Punjab's role in international trafficking chains.

Geographical Concentration

Crimes are predominantly concentrated in the following areas –

Shivalik Foothills – A natural corridor for wildlife.

Key Districts – Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Pathankot, Rupnagar, SAS Nagar, and Tarn Taran.

Methods of Execution

The crimes involve a mix of opportunistic and organized methods –

Trapping – Nets, clutch-wire snares, and metal traps.

Force – Use of firearms and trained dogs for tracking/killing.

3. The National Landscape of Wildlife Crime

Scale of the Issue (2020–2024)

India recorded 2,701 wildlife crime cases during this period. While high, there has been a notable decline –

2020 – 820 cases.

2024 – 354 cases.

State-Wise Breakdown

The states reporting the highest number of cases over this period include –

1. West Bengal – 349 cases.

2. Uttar Pradesh – 297 cases.

3. Haryana – 243 cases.

Major Forms and Drivers

1. Poaching for Body Parts – Demand for ivory, rhino horns, and tiger skins.
2. Illegal Pet Trade – Smuggling of exotic live wildlife and birds.
3. Marine Crimes – Killing dolphins for bait or consumption; harvesting marine turtle shells and eggs.
4. Drivers – High global demand for traditional medicine and luxury derivatives, alongside sophisticated organized crime syndicates.

4. Legal and Policy Framework

India utilizes a multi-layered approach to regulate and protect its biodiversity.

Framework	Mechanism / Body	Role & Responsibility
National Law	Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972	The primary legislation for protection of plants and animal species.
Statutory Body	Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)	Coordinates intelligence, enforcement, and capacity building across states and customs.
International	CITES	Regulates international trade to ensure it doesn't threaten species survival; incorporated into Indian law.
Field Enforcement	State Forest Departments	Responsible for on-ground protection and patrolling within protected areas.

5. Challenges and Constraints

Low Conviction Rates – Often less than 10% due to evidentiary gaps and poor documentation of cases.

Porous Borders – Exploitation of borders with Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. (e.g., 1,200 turtles seized at the Myanmar border in 2024).

Human-Wildlife Conflict – Retaliatory killings (poisoning/hunting) by villagers due to crop raids by elephants (Odisha) or leopard attacks (Himachal Pradesh).

6. Way Forward

To effectively curb wildlife crime, the following strategies are recommended –

Technological Integration – Use of drones, camera traps, and e-surveillance (successfully modeled in Kaziranga National Park to reduce rhino poaching).

Judicial Reforms – Establishing special wildlife courts to fast-track cases and improve conviction rates.

Forensic Strengthening – Developing better forensic evidence systems to bridge "evidentiary gaps."

Inter-Agency & International Coordination – Strengthening ties with neighboring countries for joint intelligence sharing (e.g., India-Nepal coordination for tiger part seizures).

Targeted Enforcement in Punjab – Specific monitoring of the Shivalik foothills and the border regions to disrupt organized trafficking routes.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/wildlife-crime-thrives-in-least-forested-punjab/article70791509.ece>