

WILDLIFE: ITS IMPACT, LEGACY AND CONSERVATION

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Abstract: The colonial era in Punjab saw significant environmental changes that showed a significant impact on the wildlife in the area. Through agricultural development, infrastructure projects, and resource exploitation, British colonial policies altered the landscape. This paper looks at how these changes affected Punjab's wildlife, the conservation measures taken during and after the colonial era, and how these actions still influence current efforts to protect Punjab's wildlife.

Keywords: *Wildlife, Conservation, Colonial Era, Punjab, Indian Geography.*

Introduction: A wide range of wildlife habitats can be found in Punjab, in the northern part of India, from the Thar Desert to the Himalayan foothills. It is a place of notable sanctuaries include Harike Wetland, a Ramsar site that is important to migratory birds like the *Black-necked Stork* and *Siberian Crane*, Keshopur-Miani Wildlife Sanctuary, which is known for its grasslands and endangered bird species, and Abohar Wildlife Sanctuary, which is in the Fazilka district and supports *Blackbuck*, *Chital*, and a variety of birds. Among the most important wildlife species are *Blackbuck*, *Chital*, *Wild Boar*, *Foxes*, *Jackals*, *Siberian Crane*, *Black-necked Stork*, *Pallid Harrier*, *Indian Python*, *Monitor Lizard*, and a variety of *Frogs*.¹ Conservation efforts place an emphasis on protected areas and community involvement in order to combat issues such as habitat loss, poaching, and climate change.

Before the colonial era, Punjab was home to a wide variety of wildlife, from the lush river valleys of the Indus and its tributaries to the arid Thar Desert, which are known for their diverse ecosystems. The region was home to numerous migratory birds in addition to *Bengal Tiger*, *Indian Leopard*, and *Blackbuck* species. However, in order to increase economic productivity, the British colonial administration focused on extensive agricultural development.

¹ R.W. Burton, *The Preservation of Wild Life in India: A Compilation with a Summarised Index of Contents*, Bangalore Press, Bangalore, 1953, pp. 16-17.

As a result, natural landscapes were transformed into farmland, wetlands were depleted, and forests were cut down. The physical environment was significantly altered as a result of major projects like the construction of the irrigation canal system, which affected habitats that are essential for wildlife.

There are more than 70 species of trees, 19 species of mammals and 396 species of birds here. Some of the fruit trees that grow well here are *Apple, Peach, Fig, Mulberry, Apricot, Almond, Plums, Oranges* and *Pomegranate*. There are significant varieties of *Snakes, Wild boar, Squirrels, Hog Deer* and *Mongoose*.

The wildlife of Punjab was affected in a variety of ways during the colonial era. Wildlife populations experienced significant declines as a result of habitat loss caused by agricultural expansion and deforestation. The *Bengal Tiger's* once-vast Punjab habitat was severely fragmented, limiting its range and causing a decline in numbers. As river ecosystems changed, the Indus River Dolphin, which is native to the Indus river basin, lost crucial habitat. Additionally, migratory bird species like the *Bar-headed Goose* and the *Sarus Crane*, which were depended on these habitats for breeding and feeding, were impacted by the destruction of wetlands. Long-term consequences for Punjab's wildlife resulted from the severe disruption of the ecological equilibrium.

Applicable Laws for Wildlife Protection

After the British left India, wildlife conservation caught the centre attraction. A landmark piece of legislation, The Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972, established a framework for the protection of wildlife and their habitats. The establishment of protected areas like Harike Wetland, a Ramsar Site known for its rich birdlife, and Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve, essential for conserving wetland species, as well as the formation of the State Wildlife Advisory Board both reflected a growing commitment to wildlife protection in Punjab. The Indian Forest Act of 1927, which tried to control how forest land was used, and Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, which tried to control deforestation and encourage reforestation, helped conservation efforts even more.

Punjab Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation, and Management) Act of 1974

The Act of 1974 ensured the management, preservation, and protection of wildlife in the province of Punjab. The purpose of this Act, which consists of 49 sections and 4 schedules, is to

safeguard, preserve, conserve, and manage wildlife as well as to guarantee the health of animals and their natural environments. The Punjab Wildlife Management Board must be established by the government (sections 5 to 8). Section 9 provides hunting restrictions. In addition, it will be illegal to use *Dogs* or *Hawks* without a special permit (section 10).

Provisions regarding the possession of wild animals, trophies, or meat are outlined in sections 11 to 15. Certificates of lawful possession, restrictions on transfers, import and export restrictions, and trade restrictions are just a few examples. A wildlife sanctuary, national park, or game reserve can be established by the government in any area it owns or has proprietary rights to. The final provisions deal with the offenses and applicable penalties in the event of a violation. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act, the government may adopt rules.²

Special provisions of the Act of 1972, impose a ban on hunting wild animals listed in the Act's schedules unless it is done with a valid license. The 1972 Act grants the government the authority to designate any area as one of the protected areas, national parks and wildlife preserves.

Colonial Punjab's Challenges and Conservation Efforts

Conservation efforts were frequently limited and in conflict with economic priorities during the colonial era. Despite the fact that some game reserves and sanctuaries were established, their primary function was to accommodate British hunters rather than to function as effective conservation areas. Poaching remained a significant problem, and inconsistent enforcement of hunting regulations existed. Human-wildlife conflicts increased as agricultural land and urban development continued to encroach on wildlife habitats. Due to habitat loss and hunting pressure, once-common species like the *Blackbuck* saw their numbers decline.³

India's conservation efforts have been greatly influenced by the laws and policies pertaining to forests and wildlife. These policies have shaped land use practices, conservation efforts, and the paths taken by particular species over time. The historical context saw deforestation as a means of earning money during the colonial era. After independence, conservation-oriented laws led to a significant shift in this practice. The Act of 1972, in

² Vasant Saberwal et al., *People, Parks and Wildlife: Towards Coexistence*, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, pp. 62-63.

³ Dean Lueck, The Economic Nature of Wildlife Law, *The Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, The University Chicago of Law School, Chicago, June 1989, pp. 300-301.



particular, marked a turning point in the national reorientation toward sustainable practices. This shift has had an impact on farming practices, with an emphasis on eco-friendly and sustainable agriculture, reforestation projects, and the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries. India's landscape and biodiversity are the result of a complex interaction of ecological, economic, and social factors. The multifaceted effects of forest and wildlife policies on land use and the preservation of India's rich biodiversity are the subject of this article. It looks at data that show how sustainable agriculture is changing, how more reforestation is being done, how conservation laws are being followed, and how the recovery of particular species helps in the long run. The cases of *Rhinos*, *Tigers*, and *Elephants* are compelling examples of the positive outcomes achieved by these policies.

Challenges Continuing and Legacy

Wildlife conservation in Punjab is still influenced by colonial policies. Historical habitat destruction and ecological imbalances persist, despite the fact that the early establishment of protected areas served as a foundation for contemporary conservation efforts. Managing habitat fragmentation, resolving conflicts between humans and animals, and preparing for the effects of climate change are some of the current difficulties. In order to restore and safeguard Punjab's wildlife, conservation efforts today must take into account the historical context of these issues. To overcome the difficulties inherited from the colonial era, efforts to reintroduce species, restore habitats, and involve local communities in conservation are essential.

Effects of Colonial Policies on the Wildlife of Punjab

The wildlife of Punjab was severely and persistently affected by colonial policies. Widespread deforestation and the conversion of natural habitats into farmland as a result of agriculture's expansion reduced wildlife habitat. The loss of habitat was exacerbated by the expansion of infrastructure and urbanization. Forest ecosystems were disrupted by selective logging and the establishment of monoculture plantations, affecting native species and reducing biodiversity. Wildlife populations experienced significant declines and ecological equilibrium was altered as a result of these policies' combined effects.⁴

⁴ R.W. Burton, *The Preservation of Wild Life in India: A Compilation with a Summarised Index of Contents*, pp. 18-19.



Limited resources and a focus on economic growth limited conservation efforts during the colonial era. Even though the British established some wildlife reserves, these areas were frequently poorly managed and did not have any effective conservation measures. Although hunting restrictions were enacted, poaching continued to pose a threat to wildlife populations and enforcement was patchy. Many conservation efforts were insufficient to address the broader environmental effects of colonial policies because they were focused on preserving wildlife for recreational purposes rather than ecological protection. The current wildlife landscape of Punjab still reflects the long-term effects of colonial policies.

Current conservation efforts must address both the legacy of previous actions and new challenges, as the loss of habitats and species persists. Climate change, habitat fragmentation, and human-wildlife conflicts continue to pose threats to Punjab's biodiversity. In order to guarantee the long-term viability of Punjab's wildlife, contemporary conservation strategies must combine historical insights with contemporary methods, focusing on habitat restoration, species protection, and community involvement.⁵

Wildlife: Impact, Legacy, and Conservation Work

Wildlife plays a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. The presence of diverse species supports ecosystem functions such as pollination, seed dispersal, and soil fertility. For instance, *Bees* and other pollinators are essential for the reproduction of many plants, which in turn supports entire food chains.⁶ The loss of wildlife can lead to a cascade of negative effects on ecosystems, resulting in decreased biodiversity and the destabilization of ecological processes.⁷

Successes and on-going challenges define the legacy of wildlife conservation efforts. Habitats and species have been saved from extinction, thanks to historical conservation efforts like the establishment of national parks and protected areas. For instance, the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 is regarded as a pioneering conservation initiative that has since influenced conservation policies worldwide. The foundation for current conservation strategies was laid by these early efforts, which emphasized the significance of wildlife and

⁵ Neema Pathak and Ashish Kothari, Sharing Benefits of Wildlife Conservation with Local Communities: Legal Implications, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, Issue No. 40, Sameeksha Trust, Mumbai, 03 October 1998, pp. 2605-2606.

⁶ Vijaya Ramadas Mandala, The Raj and the Paradoxes of Wildlife Conservation: British Attitudes and Expediencies, *The Historical Journal*, 58, 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, March 2015, p. 107.

⁷ Balakrishna Seshadri, *The Twilight of India's Wild Life*, John Baker Publishers, London, 1969, pp. 28-29.

natural habitat protection.

Modern wildlife conservation work involves a multifaceted approach, including habitat preservation, legal protection, and community involvement. Conservationists employ various strategies to address threats to wildlife, such as poaching, habitat destruction, and climate change. For example, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) uses the Red List to assess the conservation status of species and prioritize efforts to protect endangered species.⁸ Additionally, community-based conservation programs aim to involve local populations in protecting wildlife and managing natural resources sustainably.⁹

Wildlife conservation efforts are essential for ensuring species survival and ecosystem health. We can contribute to a sustainable future for the biodiversity of our planet by comprehending the impact of wildlife, recognizing the legacy of previous conservation efforts, and supporting ongoing conservation efforts.

Numerous risk factors threaten the survival and well-being of wildlife. Animals are forced into smaller, more fragmented areas, where they struggle to find food, mates, and shelter as a result of habitat destruction caused by agriculture, deforestation, and urbanization. These difficulties are made more difficult by climate change, which alters weather patterns, affects the availability of food, and shifts habitats. Ecosystems are poisoned by chemicals, plastics, and other contaminants, and wildlife's reproductive and health processes are disrupted as a result. Through poaching, hunting, and competition for resources, human-wildlife conflict, fuelled by growing human populations and encroachment into natural habitats, further threatens species. Lastly, human activity can introduce invasive species that outcompete native species for resources, resulting in imbalances in the ecosystem and the decline of native wildlife. Comprehensive conservation strategies that incorporate habitat protection, climate change mitigation, pollution control, and sustainable human-wildlife coexistence practices are necessary to address these risk factors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact that policies and laws

⁸ *Annual Report of the Wild Life Preservation Department, 1956-57, 1957-58 & 1958-59*, Controller of Printing and Stationery, Chandigarh, 1960, pp. 12-13. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, File No. 3481)

⁹ *Ibid.*



pertaining to forests and wildlife have on farming, horticulture, conservation, and the reintroduction of endangered species in India. Assessing the efficacy of conservation efforts and determining a sustainable course for India's natural heritage require an understanding of these dynamics. India's forest and wildlife laws and policies have had a significant impact on land use practices and the preservation of the country's natural heritage. This journey, which was characterized by colonial exploitation, has evolved toward a conservation-oriented strategy with significant positive outcomes. Farming, horticulture, and conservation practices have evolved toward ecological sensitivity and sustainability as a result of these policies. Policies that emphasize the use of environment friendly and sustainable farming practices have had a significant impact on agricultural activity. Organic farming and agroforestry are sustainable alternatives that have less of an impact on forests and wildlife habitats than conventional agriculture. The need to balance agricultural productivity with ecological preservation is becoming increasingly apparent, as evidenced by these modifications.

In terms of how to plant trees, policies have made it easier to plant native tree species. Not only does this assist in the restoration of degraded landscapes, but it also creates crucial routes for wildlife movement. This is a deliberate effort to repair damage from the past and foster a healthier relationship between humans and wildlife. The foundation of conservation efforts is the establishment of protected areas, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries. To safeguard their distinctive ecosystems and wildlife populations, these designated areas are subject to stringent regulations. The biodiversity that thrives in these protected areas is evidence of this impact.