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# THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE “MAN-EATER”: A STUDY OF COLONIAL PRECEDENT AND STATUTORY REGULATION UNDER THE WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT, 1972

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Upasana Ghosh, B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) at ICFAI University, Dehradun

## ABSTRACT

This article traces how Indian law has authorised the killing of dangerous, “man-eating” wildlife, with insight into three cases from colonial India: the Leopard of Rudraprayag (1918-1926), Champawat tigress (1900-1907) and the Chowgarh Tigers (1925-1930). It situates these hunts within the colonial status of the Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act (1912), Indian Forest Act (1878 and 1927) and Arms Act (1878). The British regime largely treated dangerous man-eating animals as informal security and vermin-control measures. It was further legitimised through bounties and executive discretion rather than the codified procedure we have today.

The analysis further shifts to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, focusing on Section 9’s general hunting ban and Section 11’s tight laws on exceptions to the hunting of dangerous animals under Schedule-I, in “good faith”. It also focuses on judicial interventions such as the Uttarakhand High Court’s 2016 ruling, curbing private “man-eater hunts.” The paper also draws attention to contemporary gaps such as ambiguous statutory limits, weak documentation of lethal records and the challenges between wildlife conservation and human safety, as demonstrated by a hypothetical present-day Rudraprayag scenario. A comparative study of Nepal’s NPWC Act, 1973 alongside India’s administrative legislations of species, wildlife and forest management.

**Keywords:** Man-eater, wildlife conservation, human safety, wildlife protection, leopard, tiger.

## Introduction

Between the dawn of the twentieth century and the mid-1940s, India saw a sharp rise in man-eating predators who have left an impressionable mark on the regional memory as well as the legal and administrative response to dangerous wildlife. It first started with the Champawat tigress<sup>1</sup>. She was active in western Nepal from 1900 to 1902, having killed around 200 people there, before shifting her range to the Champawat district of Kumaon, in Uttarakhand, in 1902. Here, she killed over 236 more people in the next five years from 1902 to 1907, as a result, paralyzing the village with morbid fear and abandonment. In 1907, her final victim was a 16-year-old girl, whose blood trails led her to be followed by Jim Corbett, who finally killed her on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1907. This tigress alone has the highest ever attributed kill count of over 436 deaths. Later, Jim Corbett figured out that the front teeth had been damaged by a previous hunting gun, which led her to target easy prey, such as humans.

The Leopard of Rudraprayag<sup>2</sup> was yet another chilling case of a man-eating leopard who terrorised the Rudraprayag district for eight straight years from 1918, thus leading to a sharp decline in pilgrims for the Kedarnath and the Badrinath yatra. Its last recorded attack took place on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1926. It was also finally killed off by Jim Corbett, who hunted it for 10 weeks before finally killing it on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1926. This leopard has an official toll of 125 deaths, even though it is suspected that the number is higher.

The Chowgarh tigers<sup>3</sup> have a mother tiger and her sub-adult cub in the picture. This duo terrorised an entire 1500-square-mile stretch of eastern Kumaon. Corbett killed the cub in April 1929 (date unknown), thinking it was the mother, and finally, in a face-to-face encounter with the tigress on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1930, he killed her. The total estimated death toll is reported to be 64.

## State's Response to the attacks and the intervention of Corbett

1. Cash Rewards/ Bounties- The government and district magistrate posted rewards every day. A contemporary letter to Corbett suggests that the government offered up to Rs. 150 for a single man-eater. The bounties had attracted local Indian hunters too, but they rarely ever worked.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, 1 (Oxford University Press- 1944).

<sup>2</sup> Jim Corbett, *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, 1 (Oxford University Press- 1947).

<sup>3</sup> Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, 41 (Oxford University Press- 1944).

2. Military intervention and mechanical methods- At Rudraprayag, units of Gurkha soldiers and British soldiers were sent to track the leopard but failed. Mechanical attempts like poison and high-powered gin traps also failed.

When cash rewards, bounties, military intervention and mechanical methods failed, officials turned to Anglo- Indian hunters for help, and this is where Jim Corbett came in, repeatedly over the three decades. The Champawat tigress killing marked his official debut as a man-eater hunter. Corbett was a licensed hunter, and the hunts were all state-sanctioned and supported through special measures. However, Corbett insisted that all rewards be withdrawn and that no other hunter shall interfere, to which the state agreed.

The area where these incidents took place was outside the jurisdiction of a legally reserved or protected forest area. The areas were either villages or pilgrimage routes.

### **The Colonial Legal Framework**

1. Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, 1912- This Act applied only to the birds and animals listed in the schedule. It included bustards, ducks, floricans, junglefowl, peafowls, quail, sand-grouse, painted snipe, spurfowl, woodcock, herons, egrets, rollers, and kingfishers under birds and antelopes, asses, bison, buffaloes, deer, gazelles, goats, hares, oxen, rhinoceroses and sheep under animals.
2. There used to be a “closed season”<sup>4</sup> specified under Section 3 of the Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, 1912. According to Section 3, the Provincial state or government can declare the whole year or any part of any year as “closed time” via a notification through an official gazette. During this time, any hunting, buying or selling of an animal under the Act was considered to be unlawful and resulted in a heavy penalty of Rs.50 under Section 4(1)<sup>5</sup> and upon conviction, the accused party could be sentenced to imprisonment and a fine of Rs.100.
3. However, the government could give a license to anyone to hunt protected species during the closed times, for scientific purposes, thus allowing them to do acts which were otherwise deemed unlawful under Section 3.

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<sup>4</sup> Indian Kanoon, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1690700/> (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Indian Kanoon, Section 4 in The Wild Birds and Animals (Protection) Act, 1912 (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026).

Tigers and leopards were not included in the original schedule, and there's been strong evidence that likely indicates that they were treated as "vermin" or game and were not protected under the original schedule. Legal and environmental histories note that under the 1912 regime, species like elephants, leopards, tigers and lions were exempted from protection and colonial policies ran systematic vermin campaigns, offering large amounts of bounties and rewards and organising hunts against predators to protect roads, settlements and plantations. Not only were they unprotected, but the Rudraprayag Leopard incident clearly tells us that the government gave out rewards for killing the man-eater and had issued more than three hundred special gun licenses to specifically shoot the man-eater, followed by the involvement of government officials. Thus, it can be easily concluded that they were treated as a dangerous game or "vermin" in the colonial era.

Hence, if we are to consider the legal character of the killing of man-eating carnivorous animals, compared to the animals listed under the Schedule, we can conclude that killing the former, even in large numbers, was completely ordinary, lawful, legally par with other animals not mentioned in the Schedule and had no statutory bars, exceptions or penalties under the 1912 Act. On the scale of administrative mobilisation, they were treated as a threat, rather than a species which needs to be protected.<sup>6</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the modern Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which has protected man-eating carnivores under Section 9, and any attempt to hunt them has to be justified as "good faith" under Section 11. The Firearms Act of 1878 further regulated possession and use of firearms in British India, thus exempting the requirement of a license for guns and ammunition for Britishers; this provided a strong backbone for lawful hunting, allowing colonial authorities to use special gun licenses for man-eaters and control weaponry among the masses.<sup>7</sup>

The Indian Forest Act, 1878, was later consolidated in 1927. It complemented the 1912 wildlife regime, as it imposed strict resource-based control on hunting. This Act classified forests as reserved, protected and village, exercising the most stringent restrictions in reserved forests, where hunting, shooting, killing and poaching are strictly prohibited, in contravention of State-made rules, punishable by imprisonment and fine. Section 32 further

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Eglood, How East India Company introduced rewards for killing India's 'dangerous vermin' tigers, *The Print* (04<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2026), How East India Company introduced rewards for killing India's 'dangerous vermin' tigers

<sup>7</sup> Model Diplomat, <https://modeldiplomat.com/learn/glossary/indian-arms-act-1878> (03<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2026).

empowered the State to frame regulating rules on hunting in protected forests, and wildlife was largely treated as ‘forest-produce’ and ‘revenue-generating resources’ rather than a protected species.

| Case                       | Area affected                                                    | Effects caused                                                                                                      | Death toll                                                                        | Killed by   |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| The Leopard of Rudraprayag | Rudraprayag, the pilgrimage routes of Kedarnath to Badrinath.    | The number of pilgrims who went to Kedarnath and Badrinath dropped sharply; people hardly left their homes at night | Officially, the number is said to be 125, but it has been estimated to be higher. | Jim Corbett |
| The Champawat Tigress      | Western Nepal, Champawat district of Kumaon, Uttarakhand.        | Accounts describe villagers refusing to leave their homes during the night and moving in groups during the day.     | 436 deaths, which is the highest number on record.                                | Jim Corbett |
| The Chowgarh Tigers        | Roughly 1500 square miles in the Kumaon division of Uttarakhand. | 27 villages lived in constant fear; they even restricted movements during daytime.                                  | 64 deaths in five years.                                                          | Jim Corbett |

It can be estimated that in the 1920s, much of the terrain traversed by the Rudraprayag leopard fell under the protected or general forest lands, rather than reserved forests; however, the issuance of special gun licenses, firearms, deployment of officials and co-ordination of the hunt implies that the kill was not extra-legal; rather, it was an authorised exercise of the colonial state’s powers, which aligns with its policies of treating larger carnivorous animals as vermin.

### **“Man-eater” as a legal category: A comparative analysis with the British colonial laws and modern statutory legal provisions and case laws**

In colonial India, the status of a “man-eater” did not have a legal provision. Instead, it operated as an administrative and factual label depending on the death toll, widespread victim fear, and

disruption of day-to-day life. Once an animal has acquired this label, the state takes exceptional measures with rewards, special gun licenses and coordinated hunts.

After India attained independence in 1947, the Wildlife Protection Act was laid down in 1972. Under Section 9<sup>8</sup>, it has been clearly stated: “No person shall hunt any wild animal specified in Schedules I and II, except as provided under Section 11 and 12.” Schedule I in the Wildlife Protection Act provides the highest and absolute level of legal protection against hunting and trade. It includes mammals such as the leopard, the Royal Bengal tiger, Indian lion, and Indian Wolf.<sup>9</sup> Here, we can see a stark contrast between the laws of British India and modern independent India. While British India never enacted any codified or uncodified laws for the species and rather treated them as “vermin”, independent India lists them as protected species, with the highest statutory level of protection. For Schedule I species, this creates a near-absolute ban on hunting and poaching.

Section 11 states that-

1. “The Chief Wildlife Warden may, if he is satisfied that any wild animal specified under Schedule I has become dangerous to human life or is so disabled or diseased as to be beyond recovery, by Order or in writing and stating the reasons therefore, permit any person to hunt such an animal or cause such animal to be hunted.
2. Provided that no wild animal shall be ordered to kill unless the Chief Wildlife Warden is satisfied that such animal cannot be captured, tranquilised or translocated.
3. Provided further that no such captured animal shall be kept in captivity, unless the Chief Wildlife Warden is satisfied that such animal cannot be rehabilitated in the wild and the reason for the same is recorded in writing.
4. The killing or wounding in good faith of any wild animal in defence of oneself or of any other person shall not be an offence.

The above states that “man-eater”, as a concept as well as reality, is strictly regulated; it cannot be directly killed in exchange for rewards and bounties at present time. Instead, it needs to be

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<sup>8</sup> India Code, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026).

<sup>9</sup> Advocate Khoj, Schedule-1 Part-I | Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 | Bare Acts | Law Library | AdvocateKhoj (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026).

verified, documented in writing, and has to be captured, tranquilised and translocated first. If all of these fail, then one may be allowed to kill a Schedule I species, given that the Chief Wildlife Warden has issued a permit. Another exception for killing a wild animal is in good faith, seen as a necessary step towards self-defence.

There have been recent case laws on the hunting of “man-eaters”, which are denoted as follows-

1. **Uttarakhand High Court, 2016 banned the private killing of “man-eaters” and the display of the bodies of the dead animals in public media.**<sup>10</sup> A complete ban was ordered on the killing of wild animals such as leopards, tigers and panthers. The division bench of Justices Rajiv Sharma and Alok Singh stated that “the wild animal which poses a threat to human life should be captured alive by using a tranquilliser gun in the presence of a veterinary doctor and shall be thereafter released in nearby forest/jungle or can be kept in a zoo temporarily and thereafter be released in its own habitat”. The High Court judges further stated that “A wild animal causes threat to life of a human being shall be taken at the highest level by a committee comprising of principal secretary (forest) and principal chief conservator of forest. No private hunter shall be engaged by the state government to kill wild animals.” Another notable mention is that there is no official process of declaring an animal as a “man-eater.”
2. **The Supreme Court in 2025 said that States must actively consider notifying “human-wildlife conflict” as a natural disaster, and ecological restoration.**<sup>11</sup> A Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India, Bhushan R Bavai, stated that “All States should have smooth and inclusive compensation policies for crop damage and the loss of life of both humans as well as cattle. To reduce the timelines to mitigate the issues resulting from human-wildlife conflict, close coordination between different agencies and departments with mandated responsibilities should be ensured.” To treat human-wildlife conflict as a potential natural disaster and ensure stronger compensation systems, including an ex-gratia payment of Rs 10 lakh to victims under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH) for the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission cycle of 2021-26. The SC has also directed Uttarakhand to fully

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<sup>10</sup> Hindustan Times, Stop declaring tigers, leopards man-eaters, says Uttarakhand HC | India News (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026).

<sup>11</sup> Live Law, Supreme Court Directs States To Consider Treating Human-Wildlife Conflict As 'Natural Disaster', Orders Rs 10 Lakh Ex Gratia To Victims (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept.2026).

restore the Corbett Tiger Reserve following reports of illegal tree felling and construction, and has mandated reforms for tiger conservation. The SC has further ordered all the States to notify the core and buffer areas of their tiger reserves within six months and to establish Eco-Sensitive Zones around these within one year. Also, there should be a complete ban on tiger safaris in core and critical tiger habitats, with a Tiger Conservation Plan prepared within three months. This implies that the court and law show primary preference to tiger conservation over commercial (such as tourism) and political interests, and the Court is prepared to intervene where actions such as tree-felling and illegal construction threaten Schedule-I species and their habitats.

3. **An insight into ‘shoot-at-sight’ orders.** In Udaipur, Rajasthan, in 2024, the Principal Chief Conservator of the Rajasthan wildlife division had issued shoot-on-sight orders for a rogue, man-eating leopard which had killed eight people in just a span of twelve days, and its victims include children such as a girl aged 5 and another girl aged 16. The forest department caught four leopards, but none of them turned out to be the man-eater. It refused to be tracked down or caught. The Army was involved and entrusted with capturing or neutralising the man-eater. A sharpshooter and twelve other shooters have been deployed at the jungle borders.<sup>12</sup> A wildlife activist filed a petition in the Supreme Court, stating that it amounts to cruelty, for the shoot-at-sight kill orders by the Rajasthan Government; however, the Court refused to grant interim relief. The Court stated that attempts had been made to capture the leopard; however, since it could not be captured, it was necessary to take this step. “Forest Officials don’t hate animals; they love them and are not anti-animals” have been stated by the Chief Justice Bhushan R Gavai.<sup>13</sup> This implies that the law and the courts follow the protocols of exceptions stated by Section 11 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which provides that any wild animal that poses a threat to human life can be killed or hunted, given that previous attempts of capture and tranquilisation have been made and have failed.

A successful conclusion can be drawn that Indian laws do justice to Schedule-I animals by offering them the highest protection from illegal hunting, killing, endangered risks and

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<sup>12</sup> Rajesh Asnani, Rajasthan govt orders shoot at sight on man-eating leopard in Udaipur, The New Indian Express (02<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2026), Rajasthan govt orders shoot at sight on man-eating leopard in Udaipur

<sup>13</sup> Abraham Thomas, “Forest officials don’t hate animals”: SC on Raj order to kill man-eater leopard, Hindustan Times (03<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2026), “Forest officials don’t hate animals”: SC on Raj order to kill man-eater leopard | India News

poaching while keeping in mind evidences, statutory obligations and proportionality, while prioritising human safety and hazards, which is a sharp contrast from the British laws; while the British laws did provide safety to the local and common masses, they had no formal constitutional law for these vulnerable species, which easily put them at a risk of endanger, illegal poaching and hunting for bounties.

**Why are carnivorous species such as lions, tigers, leopards and wolves listed under Schedule-I, even though they are carnivorous and might turn into man-eaters?**

Schedule-I provides the highest legal protection to animals, but why are animals such as leopards, tigers, lions and wolves granted this level of protection to preserve their species, even though they carry the potential risk of turning into man-eaters? This is because, when we see from an ecological standpoint, tigers, lions and leopards are apex predators of their respective ecosystems; they control herbivore populations, thus preventing overgrazing. This, in turn, maintains soil health, vegetation, and water regimes.

Similarly, from a legal standpoint, Section 48A and Section 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution explicitly mention the state's duty to protect the environment and the Citizen's duty to protect wildlife. The Supreme Court has repeatedly interpreted these provisions to indicate that forests and wildlife are a critical part of the public trust, which needs to be protected for the present as well as for future generations. Law also recognises that increased human intervention into forest areas has created friction between man and wildlife. And the conflict created by this friction is often a product of illegal hunting, prey depletion, habitat loss and fragmentation rather than a default 'rogue' behaviour. For example, if we are to take into account the Champawat tigress's history, the tigress had her upper and lower canine teeth severely broken from an old gunshot wound by a local hunter, as mentioned by its hunter, Jim Corbett. These broken canines made it impossible for the tigress to hunt agile wild prey like deer or wild boar, which resulted in her shifting to easier prey such as humans. If the tigress had her teeth in fine condition, then the chances of her becoming a man-eater would have been much less than the record death toll of 436 people<sup>14</sup>. Thus, we can infer that it became a man-eater after the intervention of a human in her surrounding territory.

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, 1 (Oxford University Press- 1944).

Taking into account both the legal and ecological standpoints, we see the protection of Schedule-I animals from a practical view,

1. Leaving them unprotected will result in a severe decrease in their numbers, which can lead to an overpopulation of herbivores, degradation of forests and grasslands and long-term loss of ecosystem services on which humans are heavily dependent upon, such as soil regulation and water regimes.
2. Removing a resident predator might end up creating a vacuum of smaller, less experienced animals, which are prone to even greater conflicts, since disruption of territorial structures can increase human contact and encounters.
3. Well-managed populations tend to have healthy eating habits, rather than man-eating, as natural prey is abundant and their territory is stable.

The man-eater is no longer a category of statutory routine extermination. Rather, it's a narrow exception within a conservation-oriented legal process.

### **What if a situation similar to Rudraprayag or Champawat arose today in modern India?**

If a situation similar to the Leopard of Rudraprayag or the Champawat tigress arose today in modern India, then the state has to consider Section 11 exceptions (dangerous, disabled or diseased), non-lethal measures, which include translocations, containment and movement regulation, along with potential High Court or Supreme Court scrutiny if any activist group challenge any lethal order. Additional layers such as the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) lay down several rules if the predator is a tiger. It states that a single attack or a single chance encounter does not automatically classify the tiger as a man-eater. A tiger can only be classified as a 'habituated man-eater' if field evidence, such as camera identification and forensic evidences prove that the specific tiger repeatedly stalks humans while avoiding its natural prey. In such cases, the state must obtain a permit from NTCA before tranquilising or removing the tiger.

The state would need to:

1. Establish that one or a certain number of leopards or tigers are responsible. This can be established by camera traps, pugmarks, DNA from hair and claw marks and the post-

mortem of victims, whenever possible.

2. A legal document that states that non-lethal options such as capturing, translocation attempts, night curfews and movement advisories have failed.
3. Issue a written Section 11, specifying the identified animal, the area and time frame, the method to be deployed (tranquilising or killing) and the agency/people authorised. It generally includes forest department staff and not private hunters. However, exceptions can be made, as in the Udaipur man-eating leopard incident. Private hunters can be involved, but only if the forest department staff has failed to capture the man-eater.

If these rules are not carried out in a time-bound and regulated manner, then any Section 11 order could be challenged via PIL on grounds like:

1. Insufficient evidence to consider an animal liable.
2. Failure to perform non-lethal options.
3. Disproportionate or extreme measures taken, for example, to kill instead of capture.

Courts would likely apply a procedural enquiry with fairness, asking whether the decision was based on objective evidence or not, whether less restrictive alternatives were considered or not, and whether the process was transparent or documented. This is a much more structured and carefully judged process when compared to the colonial era, where Corbett and Anderson hunted without any judicial or legal oversight.

### **Structural problems in modern Indian Wildlife law and practice and their proposed solutions.**

1. Wrong identification and arbitrary and politically driven man-eater declarations. This can be explained by the mass shoot-on-sight killings of several innocent big cats before 2016 in Uttarakhand. Senior forest officials, including former Chief Wildlife Wardens, have admitted that the department buckled under pressure from local villagers and politicians. Whenever a human death occurred near a forest, public panic peaked, and local MLAs organised protests, ordering several shoots over calls or messages before

proper identification of whether the targeted animal was the real culprit or not.<sup>15</sup> Since their priority was calming down the public under pressure rather than scientific verification, several innocent leopards and tigers were killed. In some notable autopsies of the bodies of the shot, alleged man-eaters, it's been revealed that its stomach was empty and devoid of any human flesh.<sup>16</sup> They were just caught at the wrong time and place. It has been estimated that more than 400 leopards have been killed between 2011 and 2016. Even though this was discussed by the High Court of Uttarakhand in 2016, the problem persists in other states. Similar instances have been recorded in Maharashtra and Karnataka as well. Some of its solutions can be given as-

- I. Not bending under external pressure, be it politics or local disparagement. There should be a proper evidence-based procedure citing camera footage, identification via DNA, forensic examinations and a documented pattern of attacks. In April 2026, 12 caged leopards were cleared of man-eating charges, followed by a negative DNA test by the Uttarakhand Forest Department. This illustrates the dangers of assumption-based proceedings related to highly protected Schedule-I wildlife.
- II. Creation of an independent expert committee that includes the Chief Wildlife Warden, veterinary experts, forensic specialists, local administrators and community representatives to verify whether an animal poses a continuing threat or its kill was due to unlawful territorial crossing, or if the animal shows stalking behaviour, while ignoring its natural prey, all keeping in mind evidence checks which adheres to Section 11 of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. This drastically reduces the local and political pressure on individual officers.
- III. Accountability and reviews should be scrutinised. If an animal has been killed or shot, there should be a mandatory post-operation forensic examination and a post-mortem of the dead animal to avoid unaccountability over the death of an innocent animal. There should be independent reviews of every killing, along with departmental and criminal proceedings against officials who act without

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<sup>15</sup> The Hindu, State had no option but to kill Avni: Minister - The Hindu (03<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2026).

<sup>16</sup> Yagnesh Bharat Mehta, Postmortem shows leopard killed was not man-eater, Times Of India (03<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2026), Postmortem shows leopard killed was not man-eater | Surat News - Times of India

any statutory proceedings.

2. Tension between community safety and species protection. In Human-Wildlife conflict (HWC) hotspots, local communities, who are direct sufferers of the conflict, view the legal system as animal-centric and indifferent to human life. They believe that forest departments and courts are more concerned with protecting tigers and leopards than the costs they have to pay with their lives, crops, livestock and cattle. When delayed permits for Section 11 are issued, which allow for non-lethal methods, the frustration grows, and they resort to methods which includes retaliatory killings, poisoning and illegal traps. This undermines both human safety by creating unregulated, dangerous situations as well as species protection. A few solutions can be devised, as stated below-

- I. Creating time-bound emergency responses- Creating district-level HWC rapid response units, which can reach an attack site promptly, install camera traps, patrol vulnerable areas in a group of 5-10 members, issue safety alerts and arrange a safe transportation system for students, workers, children and pilgrims.
- II. Establish separate village-level committees, comprising forest officials, women, livestock and cattle owners, panchayat members and forest-right holders. This committee should be responsible for mapping out risk areas, reporting predator sightings, monitoring compensation claims and deciding preventive measures.
- III. A transparent Section 11 permit should be made publicly accessible, with clear instructions on non-lethal means, reasoned orders for Schedule-I animals and recent acknowledgements of the evidence acquired, which may include camera traps, forensic and DNA evidence. It should also include documented attempts at non-lethal means of tranquilisation, capture or mobility confinement, with clear reasoning that lethal action is a last resort.

3. The compensation provided is considered an insufficient substitute. Ex-gratia payments are delayed and are not enough when considered against the actual economic losses of crops, livestock, property and cattle. It is also hard to access due to the gap between bureaucratic hurdles and local communities. Mere compensation cannot replace the

continuous psychological fear and distress, or the loss of a child or the sole earning member of the family. It can be fixed by-

- I. Paying an interim relief amount within 48-72 hours of the verification of the incident, followed by the full amount, which is to be compensated within the next 30 days while the paperwork is processed. This provides an option for bereaved families to have the basic financial support they deserve. This has already been implemented in Assam's recent policy models, which use district-level funds and a 72-hour payment target.
- II. Compensate for the actual loss, instead of a fixed amount. Flat, symbolic, fixed amounts should be replaced with real, independent, market-value payments. This calculation should include potential profits from a productive animal, crop-replanting costs and the loss of earnings from the person who used to be the primary breadwinner of the household. The present compensation framework leaves crop and property jurisdictions to the individual states and union territories, which creates inconsistencies.
- III. Provide long-term psychological as well as rehabilitation support to victims. For deaths, permanent disability and repeated conflict, add pension support, education loans or scholarships for children, livelihood replacement, subsidised insurance for crops and livestock and trauma counselling for the victims. Several studies have shown that animal-affected conflicts show dissatisfaction among several communities who receive delayed compensation.

### **What can India learn from other countries? A brief insight into Nepal.**

The core law of Nepal that protects endangered and threatened species is the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973<sup>17</sup>.

- It lists protected wildlife in Schedule I, which covers the one-horned rhinoceros, royal Bengal tiger, snow leopard, Asian elephant, musk deer, red panda, and gharial crocodile, among others. Strict hunting and trade bans are in place, with hefty penalties

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<sup>17</sup> Government of Nepal, Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Environment, National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2029(1973) | Central Fisheries Promotion and Conservation Center Nepal Government (04<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2026).

from 500,000 to 1 million NPR if a poacher is found to be trading parts like rhino horn, deer musk or snow leopard skin. Jail terms of five to fifteen years are also applicable.

- This is the most distinctive, as well as copied, idea from Nepal. The Buffer Zone Management Regulation of 1986 mandates a 30-50% revenue-sharing program from park fees and funds, which in turn grants local communities rights to development, forest management, and to establish healthy relationships between the local people and the park. This can be seen in Chitwan, where 50% of the park's annual revenue was directed back to buffer-zone communities for development and income-generating activities.<sup>18</sup>
- Nepal has built a single chain that links community-based anti-poaching units through a National Tiger Conservation Committee, all the way to the Prime Minister's Office. It also involves the Nepal Police and Nepal Army directly, which results in direct political accountability. As a result, Nepal's tiger population grew with a sharp decline in hunting and poaching activities.
- Nepal has issued a legal framework that provides efficient distribution of compensation and relief in human-wildlife conflict cases, which has been effective since 2023.
- The Nepal government has handed over one-third of the country's forests, approximately 28%, to local communities for management, which in turn saved forests and wildlife and reduced poverty.

What India can formally learn and implement-

- India's buffer zones do not have a statutory revenue-sharing concept. Funding is project-based and discretionary rather than a mandatory legal enforcement. This weakens the resolve of the local communities living beside tigers and leopards to tolerate them. India can legislate a fixed revenue-sharing formula, rather than being dependent on project-based approvals and discretion. This will provide a helping hand in bridging the gap between local communities and the wildlife in terms of

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<sup>18</sup> Bed Kumar Dhakal et al., Human-Wildlife Coexistence in Nepal: Evolution of Relief Policies and Practices, 36 *Academia* 83, 89 (1994).

development.

- India's body that controls poaching, i.e. the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF), are much more layered than a single chain running all the way to the Prime Minister's office. India should focus on creating high accountability and a single chain to regulate poaching rather than scattered laws and regulations under WCCB and STPF and state-governed jurisdictions.
- India's compensation schemes vary state by state and are incredibly slow in implementation, which has been cited as the foremost driver of retaliatory killing by local communities. The implementation of a legally time-bound compensation framework, rather than the current, delayed compensation framework, can be a direct lesson for India.

Nepal can be seen as a useful comparison for India, since it has achieved significant results, which include the tripling of its tiger population<sup>19</sup> and zero poaching of rhinos and tigers<sup>20</sup> in recent years.

## Conclusion

The Indian Wildlife laws have travelled a long path from the British colonial regime, which treated the hunting of tigers, leopards and lions as “vermin” or a “dangerous sport”, which was supported by hefty rewards and bounties, to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which gave the highest level of protection under Schedule-I to these big cats and elephants, justifying their killing under a narrow provision of Section 11. Repeated judicial interventions, from the Uttarakhand High Court's ruling in 2016 to the Supreme Court's rulings on compensation and protection of habitats, have repeatedly established the presence of procedural fairness and accountability, which were completely absent during the colonial regime.

However, codification has yet to resolve the gaps between law and practice. Misidentification, delayed Section 11 permits, and inconsistent and insufficient compensation create mistrust between the forest departments and affected communities, giving rise to threats to the communities as well as the wildlife. Nepal's model constitutes statutory revenue sharing,

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<sup>19</sup> Worldwildlife, Nepal Wild Tiger Numbers Triple, Showing Coexistence Matters | WWF (04<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2026).

<sup>20</sup> Worldwildlife, How Nepal Achieved Zero Poaching | WWF (04<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2026).

unified anti-poaching regulations and time-bound compensation, demonstrating that these problems are fixable without rewriting the core Indian framework. The man-eater is no longer a question concerning legal protection. Instead, it's a question of legal and time-bound execution: how quickly the law is applied and implemented in respective situations and how human lives are compensated.