



## Culling of Vermin

**For Prelims:** Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Vermin, Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021

**For Mains:** Contribution of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 in the conservation of the various flora and fauna. Culling of vermin's poses a severe threat to the food chain of an ecosystem

### Why in News?

The [Wildlife \(Protection\) Amendment Bill, 2021](#) was introduced in the Parliament to amend the [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#) in December 2021.

- The basic motive of the amendment is to align the act according to changes in circumstances and trying to emulate a proper solution as per culling of vermin are concerned.

### What are Vermin?

- **Vermins** are basically a **problematic animal** or a **nuisance creature** because they threaten **humans, crops, livestock, or property**.
- Species which have been classified as the **Vermin** placed in **schedule V** of the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
  - Example: common crows, fruit bats, rats and mice, which may be hunted freely.
- The act does not define the word **Vermin**. The **62<sup>nd</sup> section** of the **Wildlife Protection Act** grants the central government the power to declare any wild animal as vermin.
- Wild animal species which are placed in the **Schedule I and Schedule II** of the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** can not be declared as **Vermin**.
  - An animal can be declared as vermin for any **specified area** and a **specified period of time**.
- In order to prevent **human-wildlife conflicts**, several states in the past have petitioned to declare various animals to be **vermin**, including **elephants, Indian porcupine, bonnet macaque, common langur** and **barking deer**.
- The Center declared **rhesus monkeys** in **Himachal Pradesh**, **wild boar** in **Uttarakhand** and **Nilgai** in **Bihar** to be **vermin**.

### What is the Wildlife protection Act, 1972?

- **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972** provides a **legal framework** for the protection of various species of wild animals and plants, the management of their habitats, and the regulation and control of trade in wild animals, plants and products made from them.
- The Act also lists **schedules of plants and animals** that are afforded various degrees of protection and monitoring by the government.
- The **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** currently has **six schedules** that assign **varying degrees of protection** to animals and plants.
- The Listed breeds and types of animals in **Schedule I and part II of Schedule II** get supreme protection. For example, Himalayan Brown Bear, Indian Elephant, Golden Geckos, Andaman Teal,

Hornbills, Black Coral, Amara Brucei and many more. Offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

- The Listed breeds and types of animals in **Schedule III and Schedule IV** are also secured, but the penalties are comparatively much lower. For example, Barking Deer, Falcons, Kingfisher, Tortoise etc.
- **Schedule V** includes the animals which can be hunted. For example, Common Crow, Mice, Rats, Fruit Bats etc.
- The plants, trees and crops mentioned in **Schedule VI** are banned from Cultivation and Planting. For example, Kuth, Red Vanda, Pitcher Plant etc.

## What Changes may be Introduced Through The Wildlife Protection Amendment Bill, 2021?

- The **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021**, makes a significant amendment in that it **reduces the number of schedules from six to four**.
  - **Schedule I** for species that will enjoy the highest level of protection.
- **Schedule II** for species that will be subject to a lesser degree of protection.
- **Schedule III** that covers plants.
- It seeks to **do away with Schedule V** entirely. It removes the schedule for vermin species. Vermin refers to small animals that carry diseases and destroy food.
- It inserts a new schedule for specimens listed in the **Appendices under CITES (scheduled specimens)**.
- The **Central government** will be empowered to **directly declare** any species to be **vermin**.
- Thus, to declare any species as vermin becomes easier.
- This change **could potentially impact 41 species of mammals, 864 birds, 17 reptiles and amphibians and 58 insects**.

## What is the Need of the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021?

- **Growing human-wildlife conflicts** poses a threat to both animals and people.
  - Such incidences in the form of crop / livestock damage are widely reported from different parts of the country.
    - The **Himachal Pradesh Department of Agriculture** recorded a crop loss of **184.28 crore in 2016** as a result of wild animals, notably monkeys.
- Since **2017**, there have been **7,562 reports of agricultural invasion** by wild animals in **Tamil Nadu**.

## What is the history of vermin & ecological imbalance?

- The genesis **vermin category** of the **The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** is a **colonial legacy** which has minimal scientific foundation.
  - The **Tudor Vermin Acts** provided for the elimination of **undesirable animals and agricultural pests**.
- The **Preservation of Grain Act, 1532**, was one of the **Vermin Acts**, and it established an **official list of vermin' animals**.
  - Owls, otters, foxes, hedgehogs, and other animals are seen as terrible food competitors with humans.
- By giving **financial incentives**, the Indian government has granted blanket permission to **eradicate the vermin population**.
  - The **Government of Himachal Pradesh**, for example, offered **Rs 500-700** for each **monkey** exterminated as **vermin**.
- This approach of the government can cause **severe ecological imbalance**.
- **Mass extermination** can cause a **vacuum in the food chain** of the area.
- **Methods of lethal control of human-wildlife conflict** endanger the targeted species but traps and snares often prove fatal for non-targeted animals.
  - After the **Karnataka government** legalized the culling of wild boars in 2016 in the cause of agricultural damage, the number of snares in the **Nagarhole National Park** in **Karnataka** surged.

- Species such as **tigers**, **leopards**, and **bears (all Schedule I animals)** were also caught in similar traps.
- The **Himachal Pradesh Government** has declared the **rhesus macaque** as **vermin four times** since 2020. This ultimately led to a **decrease in the population by 33.5%**.
- **Non-lethal methods** of human-wildlife conflict management have been shown to be **more effective** than **lethal methods**.
- More importantly, **mass culling** does not address the real reason.

## Why are human-wildlife conflicts rising?

- The main reason for the rise in Human-Wildlife Conflicts are **habitat destruction and encroachment**.
- **Developmental projects, industrialisation and agricultural expansion** have drastically **reduced forest cover**.
- This ultimately led to bringing the wild animals near agricultural settlements creating the problems of human-wildlife conflict.

## Way Forward

- Declaring an animal a **'vermin'** is neither a **sustainable** nor an **effective solution** towards **mitigating human-wildlife conflicts**.
- Consequently, there is an urgent need to maintain a **database** on the extent of crop damage and conduct **scientific surveys or censuses** on problem-causing animals and conflict patterns.
- **Unscientific and abrupt decisions** made without data will have a long-lasting impact on the **ecosystem and biodiversity**.

**Source: DTE**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/culling-of-vermin>

