BHARATI INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (BIJMRD)

(Open Access Peer-Reviewed International Journal)

DOI Link : https://doi.org/10.70798/Bijmrd/04040006

Available Online: www.bijmrd.com | BIJMRD Volume: 4 | Issue: 04 | April 2026 | e-ISSN: 2584-1890

Hunting: A Major and Little-Studied Problem in India, a Crucial Conservation Area on a Worldwide Scale

Matiur Rahaman[1] & Dr. Shankar Nath Sen[2]

1. Research Scholar, Department of English, Seacom Skills University, Kendradangal, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India, Email: iammrahaman1318@gmail.com
2. Former Associate Professor of English, Bangabasi Evening College, 19, Raj Kumar Chakraborty Sarani, Kolkata, Present- Instructor, Department of English, Seacom Skills University, Kendradangal, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India. Email: shankarsen148@gmail.com

Abstract:

In terms of worldwide conservation, India is in a paradoxical position because it is both one of the most biodiverse countries in the world and one of the most densely populated, leading to severe conflicts between the survival of wildlife and human needs. India is a conservation area of planetary significance, supporting over 8% of global biodiversity within just 2.4% of the Earth's land surface and housing four of the 36 recognised biodiversity hotspots worldwide. However, compared to its true ecological impact, hunting—which includes subsistence poaching, commercial wildlife trafficking, ritualistic killing, and crop-protection culling—remains a seriously understudied concern. While habitat loss and the preservation of charismatic megafauna like tigers, elephants, and rhinoceroses have received a lot of scientific and policy attention, the wider range of hunting pressure across taxonomic groups, geographical regions, and socioeconomic contexts has not gotten enough attention. The legislative framework under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 is reviewed, the unique challenges of northeast India and other biodiversity-critical regions are examined, the social aspects of indigenous and subsistence hunting are explored, and a comprehensive research and policy agenda is proposed. This paper summarises current knowledge on hunting as a conservation threat in India. It contends that India's biodiversity will continue to quietly decline in the absence of a more methodical, multidisciplinary, and geographically encompassing understanding of hunting dynamics, especially among the less researched taxa that support ecosystem function.

Keywords: *Northeast India, Western Ghats, Illegal Wildlife Trade, Hunting, Poaching, Bushmeat, India, Biodiversity Conservation, Wildlife Protection Act, And Subsistence Hunting.*

1. Introduction

India is at the intersection of tremendous biological diversity and intense demand to conserve it. The nation is home to about 8% of the world's biodiversity, which includes an amazing variety of plants, animals, and endemic species that are unique to the planet, although making up only 2.4% of its total geographical area. The Himalayas, the Western Ghats, the Indo-Burma region, and the Sundaland (including the Nicobar Islands) are four of the 36 known biodiversity hotspots in the world that are either inside or cross Indian

borders. These hotspots support hundreds of millions of people's livelihoods, maintain watersheds, control the climate, and act as functional ecological systems in addition to being reservoirs of biological uniqueness.

As a result, its biodiversity is under extreme strain. The reduction in biodiversity in India is commonly acknowledged to be caused by land-use change, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, pollution, and climate change. Hunting, which is widely defined to include illegal poaching, subsistence hunting, commercial wildlife trafficking, ritualistic and ceremonial killing, and conflict-driven culling, has, however, garnered disproportionately less systematic scientific attention among these concerns. Because hunting affects species that might not be identified by traditional survey methods, operates over a wide variety of taxa and locations, and interacts dynamically with poverty, governance, culture, and market factors, this study gap is particularly concerning.

Studies from South America and Africa, where the extent of animal exploitation has been well recorded, have dominated the global literature on bushmeat hunting. In contrast, while experiencing dramatic range shrinkage and small population extinctions, Asian wildlife has gotten far less attention. India is one of the most important cases in Asia because of its high population density (roughly 1.4 billion people), the existence of sizable indigenous and forest-dependent communities, the variety of cultural relationships with wildlife, the lack of enforcement capabilities throughout large forested areas, and the confluence of domestic and international illegal wildlife trade networks.

This essay offers a thorough analysis of hunting as a threat to Indian conservation. It goes like this: Section 2 describes India's importance as a worldwide conservation area. The forms and motivations of hunting in India are examined in Section 3. The institutional and legislative structure pertaining to wildlife conservation is examined in Section 4. Northeast India is the area of particular importance in Section 5. The social aspects of hunting are examined in Section 6, with a focus on indigenous cultures. The ecological effects of hunting pressure are examined in Section 7. The research limitations that make hunting understudied are reviewed in Section 8. Policy implications and future directions are covered in Section 9. Section 10 comes to an end.

2. India as a Global Conservation Region

2.1 Biodiversity Richness and Endemism

Coined by Norman Myers in 1988 and organised by Conservation International, the term "biodiversity hotspots" refers to areas that are both extremely rich in endemic species and seriously endangered by habitat loss. A region must have lost at least 70% of its original natural vegetation and have at least 1,500 indigenous vascular plant species in order to be eligible. Together, India's four hotspots remarkably meet these requirements.

Approximately 3,160 of the more than 10,000 plant species found in the Himalayas are native to the area. Famous animals like the Himalayan tahr (Hemitragus jemlahicus), red panda (Ailurus fulgens), and snow leopard (Panthera uncia) are examples of species whose survival depends on the integrity of Indian habitats. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Western Ghats are home to an astounding variety of flora, reptiles, and amphibians, many of which are unique. With exceptionally high levels of vertebrate endemism and a continuous process of species discovery, the Indo-Burma region, which includes portions of northeastern India, is among the most biologically diverse on Earth. Over the past 20 years, several large mammal species have been newly described from the region. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which make up the Sundaland component, contribute distinctive island biodiversity with significant speciation rates.

India is home to about 91,000 known animal species and 45,500 known plant species outside of these hotspots. The nation's vast network of protected areas, which includes 104 national parks, more than 515 wildlife sanctuaries, and 18 biosphere reserves, is frequently considered to be underfunded and poorly run. Crucially, India's protected areas have been credited for averting any known mammalian extinction over the

previous 70 years. This accomplishment highlights the importance of these regions for conservation, but it can also mask the long-term, non-lethal deterioration taking place throughout many landscapes.

2.2 Ecological and Economic Stakes

India's biodiversity supports the lives of hundreds of millions of people, making it more than just a topic of theoretical scientific interest. The integrity of India's forests and associated wildlife communities is closely linked to ecosystem services such as pollination, soil stabilisation, carbon sequestration, and watershed regulation. An estimated one-third of India's GDP is thought to be heavily reliant on ecosystem services. Therefore, the economic ramifications of wildlife population decline go well beyond the immediate extinction of specific species.

Furthermore, India's biodiversity lies at the crossroads of several international conservation goals. The nation is home to the biggest populations of Asian elephants (Elephas maximus), one-horned rhinoceroses (Rhinoceros unicornis), tigers (Panthera tigris), and several other globally endangered species. Successes or failures in conservation in India have an impact on populations of globally endangered species as well as worldwide biodiversity assessments. This emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend every threat category, especially hunting, which is often overlooked.

3. Forms and Drivers of Hunting in India

3.1 Subsistence and Bushmeat Hunting

The killing of wild animals for food, or subsistence hunting, is ingrained in the diet and culture of many Indian people who depend on forests. An estimated 5 million tonnes of bushmeat are consumed annually by local populations in tropical regions worldwide. Indigenous groups in northeastern India, the Western Ghats, central India, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands all engage in sustenance hunting. At least 54 wild species or taxa have been used by 19 distinct indigenous tribes in the Western Ghats, according to studies; the most commonly used groups include freshwater fish, herpetofauna, and small animals.

The fact that forest departments disproportionately target large mammals for punishment while paying significantly less attention to the far more common hunting of fish, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals is a particularly significant finding from this study. Because of this enforcement bias, there is a systematic blind spot in conservation: the most hunted taxa are the least protected and monitored, despite the fact that their ecological roles in pollination, seed dispersal, nutrient cycling, and prey provision may be just as important as those of charismatic megafauna.

3.2 Commercial Poaching and the Illegal Wildlife Trade

Beyond sustenance, India is home to a highly structured, profit-driven system of hunting and trafficking. According to some estimates, the illegal wildlife trade is the second largest illegal global operation behind the drug trade, with an estimated yearly value of billions of dollars. India is a transit hub for international trafficking routes as well as a source nation for valuable species. States like Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Assam are important transit centers for wildlife trafficking in both local and foreign markets.

One of the most sought-after species in the illicit trade is the tiger. Poaching is directly caused by the ongoing demand for tiger bones due to their usage in traditional medicine, especially in Chinese and other East Asian markets. According to research, the trafficking in tiger bones has occasionally been a bigger threat to the species' existence than habitat degradation. In the mid-1980s, the poaching of tigers for the traditional Chinese medicine market started in earnest in northern India. By the early 1990s, substantial amounts of tiger skins and bones were routinely captured, exposing the existence of highly organised

criminal networks with high-level backing. In addition to tigers, elephants are targeted for their ivory, rhinoceroses for their horns, pangolins for their scales, star tortoises, monitor lizards, and snakes for a variety of end purposes, including as luxury products, traditional medicine, and the trade in exotic pets.

3.3 Ritualistic and Ceremonial Hunting

Ritualistic or ceremonial killing, which is usually connected to periodic festivals and indigenous tribes' customs, is a unique and frequently disregarded type of hunting in India. For instance, the yearly hunting celebrations known as Shikar Utsav in West Bengal, which are customarily held by Adivasi communities like the Santals, entail sizable, well-planned group hunts that kill a wide range of wildlife, including species that are designated as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. According to research conducted in the districts of Jhargram and West Medinipur, these hunts have targeted at least 93 animal species, seven of which are classified as vulnerable by the IUCN. Interestingly, a large number of participating communities were not aware that this kind of hunting was prohibited, and the activities' ecological impact is increased by drawing participation from large catchment regions.

Because they are both a real threat to wildlife and an expression of indigenous cultural identity with deep historical origins, these ritualistic hunts pose a particularly difficult conservation problem. In India, there has been continuous legal and political discussion about the conflict between upholding wildlife laws and honouring the rights and customs of native tribes living in forests.

3.4 Conflict-Driven Killing and Crop Protection

Another important and little-researched factor contributing to population reduction is the killing of wildlife in reaction to perceived or actual threats to livestock and crops. Among the species most commonly killed in conflicts between humans and wildlife are rhesus macaques, elephants, wild boar, and nilgai. Snares, wire traps, poison, and live electric wire are frequently used in these murders; because these techniques are indiscriminate, they kill a far greater variety of species than those intended. The widespread usage of snaring devices in forests has been verified by studies conducted in Telangana and other states; hundreds of traps have been found during enforcement campaigns. fight-driven hunting may be significantly contributing to the extinction of animals that do not directly fight with humans but coexist in similar environments due to the non-selectivity of these tactics.

4. The Legal and Institutional Framework

4.1 The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

The animal (Protection) Act (WLPA) of 1972, which was passed under the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi in reaction to the sharp loss in animal populations that had happened through the middle of the twentieth century, is India's main tool for protecting wildlife. The number of tigers in India had dropped from an estimated 40,000 at the beginning of the century to about 1,827 by 1972, necessitating an immediate legal reaction. The WLPA was a historic law that, among other things, outlawed the hunting of almost all wild species, created a system of protected areas, controlled the traffic in wildlife and wildlife products, and built an enforcement structure.

The Act divides animals into six schedules, each of which offers a different level of protection. Absolute protection is provided under Schedule I and Part II of Schedule II, with the harshest penalties for infractions. While some creatures, such as common crows, fruit bats, rats, and mice, are classified as vermin in Schedule V, which permits unrestricted hunting, species in Schedules III and IV are protected with less severe penalties. Only in rare situations—where an animal directly and immediately endangers human life or when scientific management (such translocation) necessitates intervention—can hunting of Schedule I species be permitted. Hunting is punishable by three to seven years in prison and a fine of at least Rs. 10,000 upon conviction.

The Act's provisions have been reinforced by further modifications. Chapter V-A, which was added by the 1986 amendment, outlawed the trading or commerce of trophies and animal products made from listed protected species. The 1991 amendment created the Central Zoo Authority and protected some flora under the Act. The 2006 amendment introduced Community Reserves and Conservation Reserves as new categories of protected areas, allowing greater community involvement in management.

4.2 Implementation Gaps and Enforcement Challenges

Despite the WLPA's comprehensive provisions, effective enforcement has proven elusive. India manages over 100 national parks and nearly 500 wildlife sanctuaries — a protected area network of enormous geographic complexity — with resources that are chronically insufficient. Corruption within wildlife management and enforcement agencies, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the low salaries of forest protection staff relative to the financial rewards available to poachers and traffickers compound the enforcement challenge. Between 2015 and 2023, registered cases under the WLPA decreased from 698 to 296, a trend that some interpret as reflecting reduced violation rates but others attribute to underreporting and reduced enforcement capacity.

A structural weakness of the enforcement system is its emphasis on reactive case management rather than proactive landscape-level monitoring. Anti-poaching units tend to focus on high-profile target species — particularly tigers and elephants — leaving large swaths of the wildlife community effectively unprotected. The use of snares, traps, wire, and poison — methods that are difficult to patrol against and that are capable of killing at scale — operates largely below the threshold of systematic enforcement attention. Research in Telangana, for example, found that a single enforcement drive recovered 3,810 snaring devices weighing nearly 5,000 kilograms from forest areas — a startling indication of the scale of undetected hunting occurring beyond the perimeter of official attention.

4.3 Indigenous Rights and Legal Tensions

The WLPA's comprehensive hunting prohibitions created an immediate and lasting tension with the traditional hunting practices of India's indigenous communities. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 (FRA) sought to recognize and restore the rights of forest-dependent communities to resources on which they had historically depended — but explicitly excluded the right to hunt or trap wild animals. This exclusion sits uneasily alongside centuries of custom and cultural practice.

Critics have argued that the WLPA has been applied in ways that disproportionately criminalize poor, forest-dependent communities engaged in subsistence activities while failing to adequately address the organized criminal networks responsible for the most ecologically damaging forms of wildlife exploitation. Tribal communities engaging in subsistence activities have sometimes been subjected to harassment, arbitrary arrests, and criminalization, even as wealthier poaching syndicates with better access to legal representation and official connections have operated with relative impunity. The Supreme Court of India has in several key judgments attempted to reconcile the WPA and the FRA, emphasizing the need to read both statutes harmoniously and to strike a balance between wildlife conservation and indigenous rights.

5. Northeast India: A Region of Acute Concern

5.1 Ecological Significance

Northeast India — comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura — is among the most ecologically significant regions in Asia. Located within the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, it harbours extraordinary levels of vertebrate and plant endemism, supports internationally important populations of clouded leopards (Neofelis nebulosa), dhole (Cuon

alpinus), hoolock gibbons (Hoolock hoolock), and a remarkable diversity of galliform birds and ungulates. The region also contains extensive tracts of forest that remain relatively intact compared to other parts of India, making it potentially one of the most significant refugia for biodiversity in South and Southeast Asia.

5.2 Hunting Intensity and Cultural Context

Hunting pressure is particularly intense in northeast India compared to other parts of the country. The region is home to 26 or more distinct indigenous communities in Arunachal Pradesh alone, many of which maintain strong cultural traditions of wildlife use that are deeply embedded in their social identity, ceremonial life, and subsistence economy. Research has documented substantial hunting of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians across communities in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and neighbouring states, with methods including snares, pitfall traps, box traps, spears, bows and arrows, handmade firearms, and poison.

A study in Nagaland documented the use of 47 taxa by wildlife vendors, including 8 mammal species, 35 bird species, 2 amphibian taxa, and 2 mollusc taxa at a single market. The preference for large-bodied mammals — particularly wild pigs, deer, and primates — using firearms is a particular conservation concern because these are the prey species on which large carnivores such as tigers depend. If prey populations are hunted below viable densities, carnivores cannot maintain reproductively successful populations even in protected areas. This trophic cascade effect means that the conservation implications of bushmeat hunting extend far beyond the species directly killed.

Camera trap studies in Mizoram have found that relative abundances of major ungulate species — barking deer, sambar, wild pig, red serow, and gaur — are noticeably lower in protected areas compared to estimates from other regions of India, with illegal hunting identified as one probable cause. Although they exist, the relative abundances of dhole and clouded leopard are still limited by the scarcity of prey.

5.3 Governance and Enforcement Challenges

Enforcement of wildlife law in northeast India faces unique structural challenges. Many areas are geographically remote, accessible only by difficult terrain that limits patrol frequency and response capacity. Community governance structures vary enormously between ethnic groups; in some areas, customary community rules regulate wildlife use more effectively than state law, while in others the absence of effective governance has created conditions of near-unrestricted exploitation. The proliferation of locally manufactured firearms — in some communities, nearly every household owns two to three handmade guns — provides a constant and accessible hunting capability that formal law enforcement struggles to address. Furthermore, the region's complex ethnic, political, and security landscape has historically constrained the operation of forest departments.

Nonetheless, there are encouraging local instances of successful conservation. Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) in several northeastern states have implemented strict internal rules governing wildlife use, including penalties such as electricity cutoff for households of repeat hunting offenders. These community-based conservation initiatives, where local people perceive animals as assets rather than threats or resources, have shown measurable effects on wildlife behaviour and abundance. Conservation organizations working in the region have found that outreach and education — particularly informing communities about the legal status of wildlife and the ecological importance of specific species — generates positive responses, suggesting that enforcement gaps are not solely a product of cultural intransigence but also of information deficits.

6. Social Dimensions of Hunting in India

A recurring challenge in addressing hunting as a conservation threat in India is the risk of conflating qualitatively different phenomena: the occasional subsistence hunt of a forest-dwelling community with limited market access; the systematic commercial operation of a poaching syndicate supplying international

markets; and the annual ritual event drawing participants from a broad geographic area. Each of these involves hunting, but they have different drivers, different social contexts, and call for different responses.

Research on indigenous hunting in the Western Ghats identified a set of socioeconomic factors that significantly predict wildlife utilization: gender (with men hunting at higher rates), land ownership, the number of domestic meat species consumed (suggesting bushmeat as a dietary substitute where domestic protein is scarce), distance to markets, time available for hunting, and distance to hunting areas. These findings suggest that access to affordable domestic protein and integration into market economies are among the most important drivers of subsistence hunting — and, crucially, that they are potentially addressable through targeted livelihood interventions.

However, it is equally important to avoid the simplistic view that education and livelihood support alone can eliminate the hunting threat. Campaigns to raise awareness about conservation do not alter the financial incentives of the hardened criminal networks that carry out organised commercial poaching. Strong enforcement, which includes well-funded anti-poaching units, successful prosecutions, and suitable punishments, continues to be the most effective deterrent for these perpetrators. Conservation specialists have stressed that community-based measures must be preceded and accompanied by strict enforcement in regions where animal populations have been reduced to critical levels, such as many portions of central India.

As has been argued in the cases of Namibia's communal conservancies and South Africa's game ranch model, the topic of whether any kind of controlled community hunting may further conservation goals in the Indian context is still hotly debated. Nearly all wild species are off-limits to hunting by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, and India's political and cultural environment differs greatly from African systems where controlled hunting has proven beneficial for conservation. Any pilot program of this kind would require major legal reforms, robust ecological monitoring systems, and strong community governance mechanisms — prerequisites that do not currently exist at scale in India.

7. Ecological Consequences of Hunting Pressure

7.1 Direct Population Effects

The most direct ecological consequence of hunting is the reduction of target species populations to levels below which they are no longer viable. Large-bodied mammals with low reproductive rates are especially vulnerable: elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, and gaur populations cannot recover quickly from intensive harvest pressure. For such species, hunting can push populations through extinction thresholds even in areas where habitat remains technically suitable. The widespread presence of snares and indiscriminate trapping devices further means that many non-target species — including small carnivores, birds, reptiles, and amphibians — are killed as bycatch, without any monitoring or accounting.

7.2 Trophic Cascades and the 'Empty Forest' Syndrome

A concept of particular relevance to India is what ecologists call the 'empty forest syndrome': the condition in which forests retain their physical structure but have lost most or all of their wildlife through hunting. Conservation experts have noted that India's vast tribal belt forests in central and northeast India contain substantial areas of structurally intact forest that are nonetheless largely empty of wildlife. The wildlife has been killed off, eaten, or sold, leaving forests that superficially appear healthy but are in fact ecologically depleted.

The empty forest syndrome has profound consequences that extend beyond the immediate loss of animal species. Eliminating important species disrupts pollination systems, herbivore-controlled vegetation, seed dispersal networks, and predator-prey relationships. A tigress requires approximately 50 to 60 successful

kills per year to survive and raise cubs; if ungulate prey populations are depleted by bushmeat hunting, carnivore populations collapse even in the absence of direct predator killing. Indiscriminate snare harvests may kill civet, bat, or bird species that are important pollinators or seed dispersers for forest trees. The effects on forest regeneration may not become apparent for years or decades.

7.3 Consequences Beyond Protected Areas

Much conservation attention in India focuses on the approximately 5% of the country's land area that is formally protected. But the vast majority of India's forest cover lies outside protected area boundaries, in community forests, revenue forests, and private lands where enforcement authority is less clear and where hunting can occur with minimal risk of legal consequence. The ecological value of these unprotected landscapes is enormous — they function as wildlife corridors, buffer zones, and source populations for protected areas — but their contribution to conservation is highly dependent on the level of hunting pressure they sustain.

8. Hunting as an Understudied Threat: Diagnosing the Research Gap

143 published articles were found after a comprehensive assessment of the literature on hunting Indian wildlife using web-based scientific databases. This statistic illustrates how little research has been done in comparison to the size and importance of the issue. Most studies focused on a small number of well-studied taxa (tigers, elephants, large ungulates) in a limited number of well-researched states. Hunting was reported as a threat in 23 of India's 28 states and 7 union territories, suggesting geographic ubiquity, but the number of species reported as threatened by hunting was strongly positively correlated with the number of published studies per state — indicating that the apparent geographic variation in hunting impact largely reflects variation in research effort rather than actual variation in threat intensity.

The understudied status of hunting as a conservation issue in India is caused by a number of structural variables. First, hunting is illegal under the WLPA, making it difficult to study openly: communities engaged in hunting may be reluctant to disclose information to researchers perceived as affiliated with enforcement agencies, and conservation organizations may face sensitive diplomatic negotiations with communities to access study areas. Second, conservation research funding and institutional attention have historically followed iconic species: tigers, elephants, and rhinoceroses attract disproportionate resources relative to their actual share of the biodiversity at risk. Third, the complex social, cultural, and legal dimensions of hunting in India — involving issues of indigenous rights, poverty, enforcement capacity, and transnational criminal networks — make it a genuinely difficult subject that does not lend itself easily to the conventional frameworks of population biology.

The enforcement bias toward large mammals further compounds the research gap: scientific studies tend to follow enforcement priorities, meaning that the taxa most frequently hunted (small mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians) receive the least scientific attention. As a result, there is a feedback loop whereby the most pressing conservation issues are consistently overlooked in both policy debate and scientific publications.

9. Policy Implications and a Research Agenda

9.1 Expanding the Scientific Evidence Base

The primary goal is to significantly increase the body of evidence regarding hunting in India. This requires systematic social surveys of wildlife use across all major forest zones and indigenous community types, standardized monitoring of hunting offtake across taxonomic groups (not only large mammals), long-term camera trap programs designed to detect hunting impact rather than merely to confirm species presence, and integration of genetic and ecological data to assess population viability under current hunting pressures. To

make studies of lesser-known taxa and neglected geographic locations competitive for financing, incentive structures for researchers should be changed.

9.2 Differentiated Enforcement Strategies

Enforcement strategies must become more differentiated in their targeting, investing substantial resources in the disruption of organized criminal poaching networks — which are responsible for the most ecologically damaging hunting — while developing more nuanced and community-sensitive approaches to subsistence hunting in forest-dependent communities. The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) requires strengthened capacity and inter-agency coordination, particularly to address transnational trafficking networks. Technology deployment — including drones, camera trap networks, DNA-based evidence collection, and digital monitoring of online wildlife markets — should be systematically integrated into enforcement programs.

9.3 Community-Based Conservation and Livelihood Support

For communities where subsistence hunting is driven primarily by food insecurity and limited access to alternative protein sources, targeted livelihood interventions — including access to affordable domestic meat, support for sustainable aquaculture, and alternative income generation through eco-tourism and conservation-related employment — offer a more effective and more equitable path than punitive enforcement alone. Northeast India's Community Conserved Areas serve as an example of how to incorporate indigenous governance into conservation management. Conservation results have significantly improved when people view wildlife as an advantage to their well-being rather than a rival for resources.

9.4 Legal Reform and Policy Integration

Sustained governmental focus and more logical judicial interpretation are needed to resolve the legal conflict between the Forest Rights Act and the Wildlife (Protection) Act. In addition to being unfair, the criminalisation of subsistence activities by underprivileged communities while large-scale commercial operators operate with impunity is ecologically detrimental because it undermines community confidence in conservation organisations and decreases the possibility of community collaboration with conservation efforts. While establishing more transparent legal procedures for the acknowledgement and accommodation of justifiable community rights, the penal systems for organised commercial wildlife crime should be reinforced.

10. Conclusion

Although India has a well-established standing as a worldwide conservation priority region, the entire complexity of the dangers it faces is still not fully understood. The reduction of biodiversity in India is mostly caused by hunting in its various forms and contexts, which has not received enough scientific, institutional, or policy attention in relation to its ecological relevance. Hunting pressure can discreetly and significantly reduce biodiversity because of systematic blind spots produced by research and conservation practice's focus on a few charismatic species and well-studied geographic areas.

Addressing this problem requires, above all, an expanded and more systematic research enterprise that gives equal attention to understudied taxa, underserved geographic regions, and the complex social systems within which hunting is embedded. It requires enforcement strategies that are tough on organized crime while humane and constructive in their engagement with forest-dependent communities. Additionally, it necessitates frameworks for laws and policies that are fair, consistent, and able to command the social legitimacy that is necessary for conservation to be successful in the long run.

The forests of India — from the cloud forests of the Northeast to the tropical evergreen tracts of the Western Ghats — are not merely national treasures. They are global assets, repositories of evolutionary history, and functioning ecological systems that sustain the lives of millions. The hunting pressure they face is real, pervasive, and insufficiently studied. Closing that knowledge gap is not merely a scientific priority; it is a conservation imperative.

Reference

- Aiyadurai, A., Singh, N. J., & Milner-Gulland, E. J. (2010). Wildlife hunting by indigenous tribes: A case study from Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. Oryx, 44(4), 564–572.
- Brashares, J. S., Arcese, P., Sam, M. K., Coppolillo, P. B., Sinclair, A. R. E., & Balmford, A. (2004). Bushmeat hunting, wildlife declines, and fish supply in West Africa. Science, 306(5699), 1180–1183.
- Conservation International. (2024). Biodiversity hotspots: Defining criteria and global distribution. Conservation International.
- Corlett, R. T. (2007). The impact of hunting on the mammalian fauna of tropical Asian forests. Biotropica, 39(3), 292–303.
- Datta, A., Anand, M. O., & Naniwadekar, R. (2008). Empty forests: Large carnivore and prey abundance in Namdapha National Park, north-east India. Biological Conservation, 141(5), 1429–1435.
- Duffy, R., St John, F. A. V., Büscher, B., & Brockington, D. (2016). Toward a new understanding of the links between poverty and illegal wildlife hunting. Conservation Biology, 30(1), 14–22.
- Fa, J. E., Peres, C. A., & Meeuwig, J. (2002). Bushmeat exploitation in tropical forests: An intercontinental comparison. Conservation Biology, 16(1), 232–237.
- Karanth, K. K., Curran, L. M., & Reuning-Scherer, J. D. (2010). Village size and forest disturbance in Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Ghats, India. Biological Conservation, 143(6), 1483–1490.
- Kumar Rana, R., & Verma, A. (2023). Confronting wildlife crime in India: Challenges and pathways to effective implementation. Frontiers in Health Informatics, 13(8), 3843–3853.
- Myers, N. (1988). Threatened biotas: 'Hot spots' in tropical forests. Environmentalist, 8(3), 187–208.
- Myers, N., Mittermeier, R. A., Mittermeier, C. G., da Fonseca, G. A. B., & Kent, J. (2000). Biodiversity hotspots for conservation priorities. Nature, 403, 853–858.
- O'Brien, T. G., Kinnaird, M. F., & Wibisono, H. T. (2003). Crouching tigers, hidden prey: Sumatran tiger and prey populations in a tropical forest landscape. Animal Conservation, 6(2), 131–139.
- Peres, C. A. (2000). Effects of subsistence hunting on vertebrate community structure in Amazonian forests. Conservation Biology, 14(1), 240–253.
- Rangarajan, M. (2001). India's wildlife history. Permanent Black / Ranthambhore Foundation, Delhi.
- Singh, R. (2023). Wildlife trafficking in Vidarbha, Maharashtra: Patterns and implications for enforcement. Criminal Law Journal, 4(1), 1–15.
- Steinmetz, R., Chutipong, W., & Seuaturien, N. (2006). Collaborating to conserve large mammals in Southeast Asia. Conservation Biology, 20(5), 1391–1401.

- Velho, N., Karanth, K. K., & Laurance, W. F. (2012). Hunting: A serious and understudied threat in India, a globally significant conservation region. Biological Conservation, 148(1), 210–215.
- Velho, N., & Laurance, W. F. (2013). Hunting practices of an Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. Oryx, 47(3), 389–392.
- Walsh, P. D., Abernethy, K. A., Bermejo, M., Beyers, R., De Wachter, P., Akou, M. E., … Wilkie, D. S. (2003). Catastrophic ape decline in western equatorial Africa. Nature, 422, 611–614.
- Wildlife Protection Society of India. (2024). Tiger poaching crisis: Background and current status. WPSI, New Delhi.
- Zimmerman, M. E. (2013). The black market for wildlife: Combating transnational organized crime in the illegal wildlife trade. Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law, 36, 1657–1689.

Citation: **Rahaman. M. & Sen. Dr. S. N.,** (2026) "Hunting: A Major and Little-Studied Problem in India, a Crucial Conservation Area on a Worldwide Scale", *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-04, April-2026.