

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Management of National Parks and Sanctuaries in India--A Status Report**  
ASHISH KOTHARI, et. al., New Delhi, IIPA, 1989, pp. 300, Rs 250.00 (hardback) and Rs.150.00 (paperback).

The post-Independent years witnessed unprecedented ravage of Indian wildlife and their habitat. Hydro-electric projects provided inroads into forests that had been hitherto closed to vehicular traffic. As a part of crop protection measure, licensing of fire-arms was liberalised in many parts of the country and what followed was a large-scale decimation of Indian wildlife. George B. Schaller, in his book, *The Deer and the Tiger* (1967) compared this carnage to the slaughter of bison in the American prairies in the 1880s. Madhav Gadgil has pointed out that substantial part of the cost of industrialisation--destruction of forests and other natural resources--during this period was passed on to the future generation and very substantially to the poor of this generation.

Though certain tentative measures were taken by the Government, like the formation of the Indian Board of Wildlife in 1951, conservation did not get the priority it deserved. The International Union for Conservation of Nature, which held its triennial meeting in New Delhi in 1969, gave an impetus to the conservation movement. An awareness that started building up, though slowly, culminated in the Wildlife Protection Act passed by the Government of India in 1971. In 1972, the Project Tiger was launched.

India has a bewildering variety of species; there are about 500 different mammals, 120 species of birds and more than 30,000 insects, not counting amphibians and reptiles. And there are quite a few species that are unique to India, like the Lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri tahr and the Great Indian bustard. And they are all in the 445 national parks and sanctuaries that cover about 2.3 per cent of the total land area in the country.

After decades of conservation, what is the situation now? What is the status of wildlife in India? How are our national parks and sanctuaries faring? A team of researchers based in the Indian Institute of Public Administration have worked for the past few years and have produced this report, *The Management of National Parks and Sanctuaries in India: A Status Report*, which for the first time provides a data base and serves as the only point of reference for our future conservation efforts.

Sanctuaries are managed by state governments and, therefore, there is no single source from which one can get an accurate idea of the status of our sanctuaries. Unless we have the data, it would be difficult to formulate policies on which proper management of the sanctuaries can be based.

The report addresses itself to this need.

The aim of this study is to make available to the public the condition of the protected areas in the country and the condition of the flora and fauna that are sustained by these areas and to make recommendations at improving the management of these reserves. Though quite a few books have been written on the Wildlife of India, from E.P. Gee's *The Wildlife of India* (1964) to B. Seshadri's *India's Wildlife and Wildlife Reserves* (1986) none of them provide authentic and basic information on the sanctuaries and on the wildlife in them. And this report contains the most comprehensive set of information ever to be compiled under one cover on this topic. Herein lies the value of the report under review.

This study has been sponsored by the National Council for Environmental Planning in 1984. A detailed questionnaire was sent to all the sanctuaries and national parks. Non-governmental organisations and wildlife enthusiasts also took part in the study. The whole team is committed to the cause of conservation and so the work of compiling this report has taken on the character of a labour of love. This team sees the connection between the need to conserve India's genetic diversity and the solution to the problems of hunger and of disease. They point out, in the preface itself, that the first victims of environmental degradation are the poor people, who are dependent on nature.

The study has revealed some startling facts; that only about 28 per cent of the sanctuaries have any management plan at all. It has been pointed out that there is no uniformity in declaring an area as a national park. Sometimes certain area with some local importance is classified as a national park while some others which sustain endangered species do not get this importance. (National parks get better protection than sanctuaries; for example no grazing is permitted within a national park while this can be allowed in a sanctuary.)

About one-third of the national parks and a large number of sanctuaries have not completed legal formalities relating to their status. The implication is that it would be difficult to enforce the Wildlife Protection Act and it would be difficult to prevent grazing and encroachment.

This study has been done under many limitations and one is that not all the sanctuaries responded to the questionnaire. Assam and Mizoram did not return any questionnaire. And some of our most unique ecosystems and species are in this part of the country, the North-East. In fact under each heading, the report takes care to point out the limitations under which it was written. The facts given in the report are reproductions of the data provided by the sanctuaries and have been independently verified. This is an important clause considering the fact that not all the sanctuaries took the questionnaire seriously. There was practically no information on water pollution in protected areas and the conclusion is that such pollution caused by pesticides and industrial effluents goes unnoticed. By pointing out these limitations, the report actually identifies the problems that afflict the management of wildlife reserves. And this would

help to change the strategy, wherever needed. Recommendations have been made on planning, research and monitoring. The team proposes to produce directories of national parks and sanctuaries and to undertake a detailed study of national parks and sanctuaries. But even with the present work, the message is clear--tighter control and closer attention.

The major reason behind the richness of Indian wildlife is the great variety of forest types, of habitats, that are preserved in our sanctuaries. In fact, most of our sanctuaries have more than one type of forest. If you consider Mudumalai sanctuary in the Nilgiris for example, you have the scrub jungle, the dry-deciduous forest and the semi-evergreen forest. The report gives details of 17 different forest types and their occurrence. Most of these forests are in mountain chains, all those in the plains having been destroyed. Though the report gives a good idea of the forest types, not much information is provided on flora. Most of the sanctuaries did not have detailed list of trees in their areas. For instance, we do not know how the rose wood trees area f...ing. In fact, compared to the information on animals, what this report has to offer on flora is rather meagre. Traditionally, forest departments have been concerned only with trees of commercial interest and totally ignored the others, however significant they were botanically.

India shares with the rest of the world, a bias in favour of large mammals. We do not have much information on small animals like the Yellow-throated martin or the leopard cat. So also our information on birds, like Peacock pheasant is very little. A number of amateur bird-watchers and wildlifers have worked on some of these species and have recorded their observations in journals like the *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* and *The Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. These sources can be utilised to gather some material on these little known species. Reliance on the sanctuary officials for providing these information can thus be reduced.

The section on management of protected areas is easily the most valuable in the report. The whole gamut of sanctuary management has been covered, including tourism. The primary purpose of sanctuaries and national parks is to conserve all living forms. Tourism can only be incidental to this and can be accommodated only as far as it does not pose any threat to the plants and animals. Unfortunately, in our enthusiasm to promote tourism, we mix up our priorities.

Captive breeding is another point that has been touched upon by the report, though India has a rich wildlife heritage, the absolute number of each species is very low. Take, for instance, the Brown-antlered Deer of Manipur, just 27 left or the Lesser florican, just a few hundred left. The report says that except crocodiles and gharials, there is no captive breeding programme worth recording.

The section on conclusions and recommendations lays down sound guidelines on which the government can base its policy of wildlife management. It has been suggested that what is urgently needed in our sanctuaries is a study of the carrying capacity for each area. Only if we have this in-

formation, it would be possible to decide how much of tourism or research work can be allowed inside the protected area, formulation and implementation of management plans, based on the requirements and objectives of each protected area is another suggestion that has been made. Governments and NGOs have to consider these suggestion seriously.

One encouraging sign in India now is that many youngsters getting involved in the conservation movement and many Non-governmental organisations are being set up. A report such as this is of invaluable help to these people in terms of providing basic information on sanctuaries, considering how difficult it is to get any data from governmental sources, particularly at the local level.

For any one concerned about the natural heritage of India, this report would give great satisfaction. Its main thrust is to preserve the nations's natural wealth. The writers of the report put it neatly in the preface. "To believe, then, that it is unimportant to conserve nature, or anti-developmental or elitist, is to delude oneself in a very dangerous manner. It is not GNP or the foreign exchange balance of a country which represents its wealth, for these are transient indicators of a fragile system. The real wealth of a nation is its natural wealth".

—S. THEODORE BASKARAN

Reprinted from Indian Journal of Public Administration (IJPA)  
Volume XXXV, No. 3, July-September 1989.