Denial of permission for scientific studies

What is the issue?

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- Wildlife conservationists believe that populations of several mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, birds and plants are plummeting.
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- In 2014, the WWF stated that the **world's wildlife population had declined by 52% since 1970.**
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- The list of endangered species in India has increased significantly from 13 species in the 1950s to 988 now.
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- Ironically, though, wildlife researchers worldwide are finding it difficult to obtain permission from authorities to assess the status of threatened species in the wild.
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Why there isn't enough data?

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- According to wildlife biologists, getting permission for research on a particular species can take several months and in some cases, more than a year.
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- It is extremely difficult for novice researchers, especially those based far away from the state capital, to pursue their case.
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- Even as turtle species continue to be traded illegally, fuelling fears of their numbers plummeting, concerns about getting permits to study them are mounting.
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- Thus, there continues to be a lack of data on ecology, distribution and population on most of these species.
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How do the researchers get permission?

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- The Indian **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, divides endangered species into four schedules according to the perceived threat level. Schedule I species are accorded the highest protection.
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- If a researcher wants to study and collect biological samples from a species listed in Schedule I, a research proposal has to be submitted to the chief wildlife warden of the state concerned.
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- The proposal is evaluated by a technical committee chaired by the warden and then forwarded to the director (wildlife), Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEF&CC).
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- On getting the go-ahead, the warden issues permission for a stipulated period.
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What are the implications?

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- Recently, the Union environment minister has requested scientists serving on different committees not to seek more field studies, since this could further delay various development and infrastructure projects.
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- The news came as a dampener for the wildlife conservation community and there are apprehensions of a clampdown on future research permits.
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- It means that the chance to assess further vast areas of unknown species is now decreasing significantly, just as are the chances to provide new hard data potentially useful for conservation issues.
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- Thus, at present, there is a need for better mechanisms for constant engagement and monitoring between the forest department and research personnel.

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Source: Live Mint

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