Kerala Seeks to Amend Wildlife Protection Act

Mains *– (GS3) Policy responses to biodiversity threats and human–wildlife conflict.*

Why in news?

Recently, Kerala has urged the Centre to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to allow selective culling of wild animals entering human habitats due to rising human-wildlife conflicts, crop damage, and ineffective current control measures.

Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
• **Comprehensive Legal Framework –** It provides the legal foundation for the protection of wild animals, birds, and plants across India, and prohibits their hunting, capture, and trade. • **Creation of Protected Areas –** The Act empowers the government to declare areas as wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, conservation reserves, and community reserves. • **Schedules for Protection –** Species are classified under six Schedules; Schedule I and II provide the highest level of protection, while Schedule V lists species that can be hunted (declared as vermin). • **Regulation of Trade and Poaching –** It prohibits trade in wildlife products and includes stringent penalties for poaching and illegal trafficking of protected species. • **Amendments for Better Enforcement –** Major amendments (e.g., in 2002, 2006, and 2022) have introduced stricter penalties, expanded definitions, and improved enforcement mechanisms. • **Establishment of Authorities –** The Act provides for institutions like the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** and **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)** to advise and enforce wildlife conservation measures.

Why does Kerala want to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972?

- **Demand for limited culling powers** – Kerala seeks the Centre's approval to kill wild animals that pose a threat to human lives or crops, particularly in **conflict-prone areas**.
- The state proposes region- and season-specific exemptions rather than blanket culling.
- **Wild boars to be declared vermin** – Under Section 62 of the Act, Kerala

wants **wild boars declared vermin** for a temporary period.

Once a species is declared "vermin", the species loses all legal protection, allowing unrestricted hunting.

- This would allow easier elimination without requiring full wildlife protections during that window.
- **Removal of bonnet macaque from schedule i** – The bonnet macaque was moved to Schedule I in 2022, limiting the state's power to act.
- Kerala now wants it downgraded, allowing capture or relocation of crop-damaging monkeys without central clearance.
- **Failures of current control mechanisms** – Kerala's wild boar control scheme, which requires use of licensed shooters, has failed.
- Regulations such as checking whether a wild boar is pregnant before shooting are considered impractical by state officials.
- **Ineffectiveness of fencing and deterrents** – Despite using fencing, trenches, and other barriers, animals continue to invade human settlements, especially during crop seasons.

What is the scale and impact of the human-wildlife conflict in Kerala?

- **Rising human casualties** – Between 2016–17 and January 2025, 919 deaths and 8,967 injuries occurred due to wildlife attacks in Kerala.
- This illustrates a severe threat to public safety.
- **Conflict hotspots identified** – Out of 941 local bodies, 273 have been designated human-wildlife conflict hotspots.
- These are mainly in forested or fringe areas.
- **Range of problematic species** – Key animals responsible for conflict include elephants, tigers, leopards, wild boars, bison, bonnet macaques, and peafowl.
    - Elephants and big cats are life-threatening.
    - Monkeys and peafowl, while not deadly, cause economic loss by destroying crops.
- **Agricultural abandonment** – Repeated raids by monkeys and wild pigs have led farmers to abandon cultivation in some areas, impacting rural livelihoods and food security.

What are the causes of rising human-wildlife conflict in Kerala?

- **Habitat degradation** – Deforestation and declining habitat quality are forcing wild animals to move into human-inhabited zones, escalating conflict.
- **Increased wildlife populations** – There has been a population boom in

certain species, especially wild boars and monkeys, leading to frequent raids into villages.

- **Grazing pressure from domestic animals** – Grazing of livestock inside forests competes with wildlife for resources and increases chances of direct encounters.
- **Cropping pattern shifts** – Farmers are growing commercial and fruit crops that attract wildlife, such as bananas and jackfruit, making farmlands more vulnerable.
- **Legal and bureaucratic constraints** – The Wildlife Act requires detailed justification before any animal can be killed. Even in emergencies, wildlife wardens must prove that capture or relocation is impossible.
- Courts have also **barred district magistrates** from invoking general nuisance laws to eliminate wild animals.

What lies ahead?

- Union Government could consider amending the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, especially regarding emergency culling provisions for specific species.
- Bonnet macaques might be removed from Schedule I, and wild boars temporarily declared vermin under Section 62, allowing more flexible local control measures.
- It could set a precedent for other human-wildlife conflict-prone states to demand similar legal relaxations.
- Crafting a framework that allows limited culling without weakening wildlife protection laws or conservation ethics.

Reference

[The Hindu| Kerala wants Wildlife Act amend to kill some wild animals]

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