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Indian Wildlife Law: Protection Inside and Outside Reserves

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Indian Wildlife Law: Protection Inside and Outside Reserves

The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 protects listed animals across all of India. A park boundary does not end that protection. Reserves add a separate layer of place-based rules, and January 2025 brought a real Section 11 test case.



A Bengal tiger, a Schedule I species under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Photo by Dr. Raju Kasambe, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

At a glance

Two kinds of protection, one hard exam trap

01
Section 9

Bans hunting Schedule I and II animals, anywhere in India.

02
Section 11

Narrow legal grounds to capture or kill a dangerous animal.

03
1 April 2023

The date the 2022 amendment's new schedules took effect.

04
2025

Wayanad's first-ever shoot-on-sight tiger order in Kerala.

Species protection. Legal protection that follows the animal, wherever it goes.
Place protection. Extra rules for land and habitat inside a sanctuary or park.
Chief Wildlife Warden. The state officer with power to order a dangerous animal's capture or killing.
Vermin.A species the government can temporarily strip of protection in a stated area.

Two Kinds of Protection

Must Know

Species protection follows the listed animal, not the land it stands on. Place protection follows the land, not any one animal.

- **Species protection.** Section 9 generally bans hunting Schedule I and II animals. This rule applies **inside and outside protected areas**.
- **Place protection.** Sanctuaries and national parks add extra rules for land, habitat, entry, and activities.
- **The classic exam trap.** A tiger leaving a national park keeps its Schedule I protection. The land outside the park does not become a national park.

See the wider guide to India's conservation framework for how species law and protected areas fit together.

> **Quick check 1.** A protected species keeps its legal protection outside a reserve. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Does Fear Permit Killing?

Must Know

Fear alone does not cancel legal protection. Section 11 sets specific grounds, and needs a written order with reasons.

- **For a Schedule I animal.** The Chief Wildlife Warden must find **actual danger to human life**, or severe disability or disease beyond recovery.
- **For a Schedule II animal.** It can also qualify when it becomes dangerous to property or crops, under a separate clause.
- **Before ordering death.** The warden must be satisfied that capture, tranquilisation, or translocation is not possible — a reasoned finding, not three failed physical attempts.

- **Self-defence.** A narrow, separate rule under Section 11(2) — it does not create a general right to hunt.

Watch this trap: mere apprehension that an animal "might" become dangerous is not enough. The law needs actual danger, or disability/disease beyond recovery.

> **Quick check 2.** Mere fear that a Schedule I animal might become dangerous permits its killing. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Which Schedules Exist Now?

Good to Know

The 2022 amendment changed the schedules, effective 1 April 2023. Read current law when answering a present-day question — an older PYQ may use the pre-2023 structure.

Current schedule guide

Schedule	Main subject	What to remember
I	Animals with the highest protection	Section 9 hunting ban; strict Section 11 exception.
II	Other protected animals	Section 9 hunting ban; Section 11 has a separate exception.
III	Protected plants	Now also holds the plants once listed under the old Schedule VI.
IV	Trade in listed CITES specimens	Trade controls do not replace the animal schedules.

- **No standing Schedule V.** The 2022 amendment removed it. Section 62 still lets the Centre notify a Schedule II species as vermin, for a stated area and period.
- **No standing Schedule VI.** Its six plant entries — Beddome's cycad, Blue Vanda, Kuth, Lady's slipper orchids, Pitcher plant, Red Vanda — moved into a broader Schedule III.
- **Plant rules, not a ban.** Section 17A restricts picking, uprooting, and selling specified plants. Section 17C allows licensed cultivation.

The Indian Flying Fox is listed in Schedule II. Its listing does not disappear outside a reserve.

> **Quick check 3.** The current law still has a standing Schedule V vermin list. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Who Owns, Decides, and Enforces?

Good to Know

Section 39 does not make every living wild animal government property. It covers listed situations, such as an animal hunted under the Act or found dead.

- **Section 11 decisions.** The Chief Wildlife Warden holds this power for dangerous listed animals; state forest staff usually act in the field.
- **Section 62 vermin notifications.** Controlled by the Centre, not a state warden.
- **Judicial review.** Courts can review whether an official order followed the law.

Remember: the animal's listing and the land's protected-area status answer different questions. Keep them separate in an exam.

The T23 Case: From Report to Lawful Decision

Great to Know

Imagine a tiger reported near a village. Officials first need reliable evidence about the animal and the danger. They then plan safe field action. The tiger's Schedule I protection remains in force throughout.

- **The 2021 case.** Tiger T23 was linked to deaths in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. Court proceedings examined the response.
- **The outcome.** The case focused attention on live capture. Forest officials ultimately **captured the tiger alive**.
- **The lesson.** This example does not make every case identical. The law requires a decision based on the specific animal, evidence, and available options.

A protected tiger walks outside a reserve. Which rules still apply?

Its Schedule I protection and the Section 9 hunting ban still apply, wherever it goes. Protected-area land rules stop at the boundary — they don't travel with the animal. Section 11 sets narrow exceptions for a dangerous animal, and those exceptions apply the same way inside or outside a reserve.

Quick check 4. Forest officials captured tiger T23 alive after the 2021 Nilgiris conflict. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2025 Case: A New Section 11 Test in Wayanad

Great to Know

The T23-style legal process played out again in January 2025, with a harder outcome. A tiger killed a tribal woman near Mananthavady, Wayanad, in January 2025.

- **The order.** Kerala's Chief Wildlife Warden issued a Section 11 order: capture or tranquilise first, with a shoot-on-sight option as a last resort, following NTCA guidelines. It was reportedly the **first time Kerala officially declared a tiger a "man-eater"** with such an order.
- **What actually happened.** Before tranquilisation could be attempted, the tiger was found dead, injured, on 27 January 2025. The exact cause has been questioned by wildlife experts.
- **Why it still matters for the exam.** The legal sequence — evidence, a reasoned written order, capture/tranquilisation attempted first — is the same process T23 illustrated. A last-resort order is not an automatic kill order.

Separately, enforcement agencies kept up pressure on the Schedule IV/CITES trade side in 2026. September raids recovered leopard pelts, star tortoises, pangolin scales, and tiger bone. Eight South Asian countries, including India, signed a joint anti-trafficking pact that same month.

Watch this trap: a “man-eater” declaration and a shoot-on-sight authorisation are not the same as an unconditional kill order. The Section 11 process still requires capture or tranquilisation to be tried or ruled out first.

> **Quick check 5.** Kerala’s 2025 Wayanad order authorised shooting the tiger immediately, with no attempt at capture first. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Edge

Previous Year Questions

> **Quick check 6.** UPSC 2022 held that every wild animal is the government’s sole property. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

If the Wayanad tiger died before capture, did the 2025 order actually work as intended?

Not fully. The order followed the correct legal sequence: evidence, a reasoned written order, capture attempted first. But the tiger died before tranquilisation happened, and wildlife experts have questioned exactly how. The legal process and the real-world outcome are two separate things to know for the exam.

Does a Schedule III plant listing mean it can never be grown or sold?

No. Section 17A restricts unlicensed picking, uprooting, and selling, but Section 17C allows licensed cultivation. The old Schedule VI plants now fall under this same Schedule III framework.

See the wider guide to India’s conservation framework for how species law and protected areas fit together.

MCQ on Indian Wildlife Law

Try 6 practice questions on schedules, Section 11, and wildlife protection.

🎲 More Environment and Ecology Practice

Practice MCQs

1. Under Section 11 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, when can the Chief Wildlife Warden authorise the capture or killing of a protected animal?

A. Only when there is mere apprehension it might become dangerous

B. Whenever a local community requests it

C. Only when it has actually become dangerous to human life, or is disabled/diseased beyond recovery

D. Only during a declared state of emergency

See answer ↓

2. In India, if a species of tortoise is declared protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, what does it imply?

A. It no longer exists in the wild, a few individuals are under captive protection, and it is impossible to prevent its extinction.

B. Both of these: it no longer exists in the wild, and it is endemic to one region.

C. It enjoys the same level of protection as the tiger.

D. It is endemic to a particular region of India.

See answer ↓

3. With reference to 'dugong', a mammal found in India, which of the following statements is/are correct?
1. It is a herbivorous marine animal.
2. It is found along the entire coast of India.
3. It is given legal protection under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

A. 2 only

B. 3 only

C. 1 and 3

D. 1 and 2

See answer ↓

4. Where is the Indian Flying Fox currently listed under the post-2022 Wild Life (Protection) Act schedules?

A. Schedule I

B. Schedule III

C. Schedule II

D. Schedule IV

See answer ↓

5. Under the pre-2022 Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, which schedule listed species classified as "vermin"?

A. Schedule V

B. Schedule VI

C. Schedule I

D. Schedule III

See answer ↓

6. The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is a statutory body, set up under which section of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972?

A. Section 5

B. Section 12

C. Section 5A

D. Section 38

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Section 11 requires an objective determination of actual danger or incurable disability, not just fear that an animal might become dangerous. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** Schedule I gives the highest, absolute level of protection under the Act. The tiger is the classic Schedule I example, so any Schedule I species gets that same protection tier — it doesn't imply near-extinction or endemism. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The dugong is a herbivorous marine animal and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. But it is not found along the entire Indian coast, its range is fragmented. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** The Indian Flying Fox is currently listed under Schedule II of the amended Act, giving it a real degree of legal protection instead of vermin status.

   ↑ Q4
5. **A.** Schedule V of the original 1972 Act listed species classified as vermin, including the Indian Flying Fox at one point. This schedule was abolished by the 2022 amendment.

   ↑ Q5
6. **C.** The NBWL was created under Section 5A of the Act, added by a 2002 amendment. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4
5. **False.** ↑ 5
6. **False.** ↑ 6

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