



Protecting Wildlife of Jammu & Kashmir

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Wildlife is an important natural resource and its role in the very survival of humans is crucial. Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is bestowed with a wide diversity of wildlife and varied ecosystems. Our snow bound alpine areas, forests, wetlands, and grasslands support a rich variety of flora and fauna. The wetlands of J&K attract waterbirds from different parts of the world and from distant lands during winter months. These wetlands are particularly important for long distance migratory birds, as a stopover site for feeding and resting. This makes J&K a very important region within the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) used by many migratory birds.

The mountains, foothills and plains of Jammu & Kashmir house a zoogeographic diversity ranging from Oriental to Palearctic flora and fauna. Our UT is divided into many geographical regions which makes it an ideal habitat for wildlife, be it Markhor in the Kazinag, Hangul in Dachigam, Snow Leopard in Kishtwar or Bar-headed Goose at Gharana in Jammu.

It is important to note that biodiversity across Himalayas is the fuel that keeps our critical ecosystems nourishing and running sustainably. At the same time, the mountains of Jammu & Kashmir have tremendous role in safeguarding people's lives and health. The national parks, sanctuaries and conservation reserves in J&K are important repositories for many charismatic species of wildlife.

Historical Perspective

There is a rich history of wildlife conservation through protected areas in the UT which represent floral, faunal, geographical diversity and are essentially a management tool aiming at nature conservation simultaneously providing a range of ecological, social, cultural, economic and spiritual benefits. The protection and preservation of wildlife has been an important component in the management of natural resources in Jammu & Kashmir. Today's Department of Wildlife Protection has its origin in the Game Preservation Department which was established in 1901 AD with the aim to preserve wild animals and birds for royal recreation and sport. The wildlife wing existed as a Game Preservation Wing in the forest Department of Jammu & Kashmir till 1979. In 1979, a directorate of Wildlife Protection came into existence. Over a period, the hunting as a game changed into organized trade for meeting requirements of various products at domestic and international markets which resulted into the considerable reduction of wild animal population in wilderness. The Department of Wildlife Protection, J&K, as it exists now came into existence in the year 1982 and since then has been responsible for conservation and management of wildlife and protected areas in J&K.

J&K a Strategic Location for Wildlife

At international level the mountains of Jammu & Kashmir are strategically located and have tremendous significance as habitat for many important species of wildlife. The mighty peaks in Jammu & Kashmir have always remained a source of inspiration and passion for mountaineers. Above the mighty peaks soar the grand raptors like Golden Eagle, Cinerous Vulture, Peregrine Falcon, Griffon Vultures, Lammergeiers, Kestrels, Hobbies and many more. The UT also hosts majestic birds like Kalij Pheasant which is UT bird of J&K and Sarus Crane in the wetland and agricultural landscape of Jammu.

Great stands of Deodar and Blue Pine clothe the high slopes, while Oak, Walnut, Mulberry and Horse Chestnut deliver their bounty of fruit and leaf fodder to animals lower down. Alpine meadows of Jammu & Kashmir besides supporting the livelihood of poor and marginalised communities also come alive each year to the profusion of wild flowers and herbs which provide sustenance to a myriad of insect forms which in turn feed birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

Wetlands of Jammu & Kashmir

The UT of J&K is characterized by a vast array of freshwater bodies of great ecological as well as socio-economic significance. These wetlands support a large no of birds and are also important for fisheries, agriculture, and recreation. Currently out of 75 Ramsar Sites in India, J&K has five wetlands which have been declared as Ramsar Sites or Wetlands of International Importance. These wetlands are Wular, Surinsar-Mansar, Hokersar, Hygam and Shallbugh. These wetlands have tremendous significance for wildlife and support a large number of migratory birds specially during winter months.

These wetlands are important for both resident as well as migratory waterfowl. They are major wintering areas for a variety of migratory ducks and extremely important breeding areas for Mallard, Blunt-winged Warbler and Ferruginous Duck besides a large number of other waterfowl. They are particularly important for long distance migrants, as a stopover site for feeding and resting. Many waterbirds occur in large num-



Hangul UT Animal of J&K

bers in the wetlands of J&K, much above the proportion of the total species abundance (1%) determined by wetlands International as one of the criteria for declaring a wetland as a Ramsar Site.

Birds and Mammals of Jammu & Kashmir

As per BNHS recent report, J&K has more than 15 Important Bird Areas (IBA's), of these Gharana wetland in Jammu and Hokarsar wetland in Kashmir are most important to mention. During the recent past, the Department of Wildlife Protection has taken many initiatives to ensure the protection of these areas as important habitats for a large number of birds. Presently the UT of Jammu & Kashmir has more than 500 species of birds. So far more than 10 restricted range species of birds have been recorded from Jammu & Kashmir. Most of these species such as Eastern Imperial Eagle, White-backed Vulture and Greater Spotted Eagle are widespread. Along with neighbouring Himachal, Jammu & Kashmir is extremely important for the long-term survival of Western Tragopan and Cheer Pheasant. Kashmir Flycatcher is another vital element of the Avifauna of J&K with its breeding population being recorded in important wildlife areas of Kashmir.

The UT of J&K has more than 110 species of mammals including 34 globally threatened with 1 Critically Endangered, 6 Endangered, 12 Vulnerable and 8 Near Threatened Species. The key mammals which J&K is privileged to have, are, "Hangul" (our UT animal), Ibex, Snow Leopard, Common Leopard, Brown Bear, Red Fox, Markhor, Musk Deer, Himalayan Black Bear, Serow, Himalayan Tahr, Barking deer and Goral to name a few.



Markhor

Dachigam National Park

Dachigam National Park is one of the most important National Parks of J&K and it holds the last viable population of Kashmir Stag or Hangul. Also as per recent studies, this National Park has one of the largest populations of Asiatic Black Bear in Asia. The park is spread over an area of 141 sq. kms in the Zabarwan mountain range of great Himalayas. Dachigam National Park was a hunting reserve or 'rakh' of the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir for a long time from 1910-1947. The park is divided into two administrative units Lower and Upper Dachigam for proper conservation and management. The name of the national park comes from the Kashmiri word Da which means "10", chi means "are" and gam means "villages". Before the existence of the park there were 10 villages in this area which were later translocated to other areas at the time of formation of game reserve by the Maharaja of J&K.

The freshwater which flows through Dachigam is an important source of sustenance for the people of Srinagar. This fact was recognized as early as 1910 by Maharaja Hari Singh Ji and was a crucial factor leading to the preservation of Dachigam - then as a private hunting ground, and now as a National Park. For once the interests of humans and those of wild animals can clearly be seen to coincide, the steps necessary for preserving this vital source of water for UT's summer capital being synonymous with those that aid the survival of the wildlife of Dachigam. Dal Lake with its house boats attracts tourists by thousands every year, depends largely on Dachigam as it forms almost half of its catchment area.

Kishtwar High Altitude National Park

Kishtwar High Altitude National Park in North West Himalayan Bio-geographic Zone, is a key wildlife site in Kishtwar district of the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory, named after district head quarter, located about 60 km north-east of this township. The park was established mostly to protect Snow Leopard, Ibex, Musk Deer and other threatened wildlife species.

Nestled between the Himalayan mountain ranges, the Park is situated at a distance of around 250 Kms from Jammu. The altitude of the KHANP ranges from 2,300 to 6,000 m above msl. This National Park is very well known for the unique assemblage of flora and fauna contained within. It also has the distinction of being the only known habitat of Snow Leopard in Jammu region. The National Park reportedly possesses a viable population of Snow Leopard and its prey species.

The entire tract of National Park is extremely mountainous bearing very steep slopes pierced by deep valleys. Due to glacial and riverine erosion since time immemorial, the entire surface area of the tract is deeply serrated in all possible directions with varying degrees of slope. It results in landmass of various aspects. The National Park is gifted with numerous perennial streams, nallas, ponds, springs and glaciers, because of which the water supply in the area is adequate throughout the year.

Threats and Conservation Issues

As in other parts of India, drastic increase in human and livestock population in J&K has created pressures on natural resources and thereby forests, pastures and grasslands have been brought under cultivation to sustain the increasing demand for cereals and other food products. Due to biotic interferences from unsustainable land use patterns in the rural areas and unplanned development, various habitats have become fragmented and these habitat modifications have caused the ecological dislocation of many wildlife species. These habitat modifications have far reaching and negative impacts on wildlife, and have caused many species to become locally extinct.

Ever increasing human-wildlife interactions in the entire Jammu & Kashmir are leading to human-wildlife conflict, which is also a serious cause of concern. There is an urgent need for participation of common masses to reduce this conflict as this is leading to rapid decline of many mammalian species in the Himalayas.

What needs to be done

The wildlife across Himalayas is dispersed and need to be managed carefully. Today we need a green recovery mission that recognizes the importance of nature as our defence mechanism. We need to realize that without plants there will be no



Kashmir Snow Leopard

oxygen and without bees to pollinate there will be no fruits and nuts. For stable and healthy J&K we need sustainable way to produce food, sustainable way to build infrastructure, clean energy to address climate change and biodiversity loss. Present time is our greatest chance to build a safer future for our children with nature at the heart of it. All of us need to understand that protecting wildlife is protecting ourselves from future pandemics.

Under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, when we regularly saw the images of labourers in big cities desperately trying to move back to the villages, a vast majority of these are from mountain areas. The need of the hour is for all of us to realize that there is a urgent need to build green economy and use this as a tool to eradicate poverty from the poor and marginalized sections of the society. Jammu & Kashmir is safe with its composite ethnic communities and coexistence of humans with the wildlife of the region. Secure Himalayas are in larger interest of national security both from Defence and from ecological point of view. Focus must be on diversification of livelihoods and farming in Himalayas has to be a attractive profession as well. We must curb illegal wildlife trade and consumption wherever possible.



Kalij Pheasant UT Bird of J&K

Focused education and awareness campaigns on the need for conservation of wildlife of Jammu & Kashmir must be given top priority. For this role of our educational institutions and our youth is very important.

Connecting Common masses with nature and wildlife

As part of green recovery mission and awareness, the UT Administration under the leadership of Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha Ji has launched "Har Gaon Haryali" programme and is giving top priority to education of younger generation to connect the common masses with nature and wildlife. In order to enhance conservation experience through nature walks a large number of nature trails have been identified, mapped and developed. The most heartening aspect of our endeavours is the fact that we have major support in the form of youth of J&K. Many youth are organised in the form of bird clubs and nature clubs. Through countless education and awareness activities, students have become so deeply involved in our conservation efforts that we can justifiably claim success in rearing a fresh crop of conservationists, who in next few years, will take over from us to protect this prestigious heritage.

(The author is PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden, Government of J&K)

50 years journey of J&K Railways

Uchit Singhal

2nd October is always special for us Indians, and why not? After all the day marks the birth anniversary of two very important personalities who helped shape the history of modern day India. But 2nd October will also mark something special, especially for the UT of J&K. The day will mark the completion of successful 50 years since the commencement of first train operation from Jammu Tawi railway station. The station which was inaugurated on 2nd October 1972 has been a witness to multiple socio-economic and political events in the history of this state. Owing to the strategic location of J&K, connectivity of this region with the rest of nation is very important not only for nation security but also to bring the fruits of development to the hitherto untouched parts of the UT. The story of railways in J&K begins from a humble origin in 19th century and stretches up to the mighty Chenab Bridge - the world's highest railway arch bridge, the majestic Anji Khad bridge - the first cable stayed railway bridge in India and T-49 tunnel which is the longest transportation tunnel of India.

The journey of railways in this region begins from around October 1888 when the work commenced on the Suchetgarh-Jammu City railway line which was a part of erstwhile NWR railway. This 17 mile stretch which opened for traffic in 1890 was later purchased by the State Government. The link connected the two different geographical regions until it got disturbed due to partition of the country in 1947. After Independence, a strategic rail connection of about 44kms was first to come in 1952 by stretching the Jalandhar-Mukerian line upto Pathankot to give connectivity to this region. But it was not until 1966 when Railways made its first entry into the state of J&K at Kathua. But this was just a beginning as Railways

still had a long way to go before it could become a vehicle of socio-economic development for the region. The same was very well realized and earnest efforts were put in to the planning of stretching the railway line further into the State and in 1969 a new project to extend the line beyond Kathua upto Jammu was started. The project in itself was a very challenging task both in terms of the engineering work involved and the deadline decided for the same. But the project was completed well in time and the section Kathua-Jammu was opened for goods traffic on 2nd October 1972 and subsequently for passenger traffic after 2 months. The importance of this line to J&K could have been judged from the inauguration ceremony in which apart from the then CM of J&K Mir Qasim, the then Railway Minister T.A. Pai and Chairman Railway Board apart from multiple other important political personalities and bureaucrats were present. This project was one of its kind and has left its mark forever as the work did not stop even during the Indo-Pak war of 1971. A galaxy of VIPs was present on the occasion to witness this historical event which brought Jammu back on the Railway map after a gap of almost 25 years.

First train to reach Jammu was Srinagar Express (now Jhelum express) which reached Jammu on 2nd December 1972 and the train was given a ceremonial welcome. Besides this train, 3 other trains were also introduced out of which Kashmir train (now Jammu Mail) and Sealdah Express are still the most coveted and sought after trains. At present Jammu station is connected to almost every corner of our country via Railway network and prestigious trains like Rajdhani and Vande Bharat ply from here. Since the day train operations began from here, the importance and contribution of Jammu Railway station to the socio-economic development of the state and integrating it with the nation cannot be overemphasized.



The role of Railways in bridging the cultural divide and bringing jobs and development to the region has been phenomenal. And realizing the same, a project USBRL which was meant to connect Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla was launched and is now on its verge of completion with only a patch of 111 km left to connect between Katra to Banihal. Once this gets completed, the region of Kashmir which has felt isolated for long will get integrated with the mainstream development process, thus giving a boost to not only tourism sector but also to the trade and industry in the State.

sonal as well social hygiene and cleanliness. The basic premise is that it is not enough that we keep only our own houses clean, but we need to develop a culture of developing an overall sense of hygiene and sanitation in the society. This day let us all take a pledge to keep our Railway Stations clean as these are not just buildings but the seeds of development, the fruits of which our progeny will also enjoy.

(The author is an Indian Railway Traffic Service officer serving in the UT of J&K in capacity of Station Director, Jammu.)

The opening of this section will be a red letter day in the history of Indian Railways when the trains will be able to ply right from Kanyakumari to Kashmir.

On this important forthcoming occasion, when the train operations in Jammu will mark their golden jubilee, the celebrations coincide with another important project meant for facilitating and improving the passenger convenience as well as experience at Jammu Tawi Railway Station. Timing could not have been better of this project, better known as the Station Redevelopment Project. Not only the improvement of façade of the station building serving the City of Temples will be brought about under this much chased after project but the station yard layout along with the present Interlocking arrangements will also be remodeled. This will help increase the capacity of this station not only in terms of passenger holding capacity but also in terms of train services which can originate/pass from here. A second entry to the station has also been conceptualized under this project which has been long felt by the people of this region.

Last but not the least, the day will mark the end of a fortnight long Swachhta Pakhwada launched nationwide to inculcate a spirit of personal as well social hygiene and cleanliness. The basic premise is that it is not enough that we keep only our own houses clean, but we need to develop a culture of developing an overall sense of hygiene and sanitation in the society. This day let us all take a pledge to keep our Railway Stations clean as these are not just buildings but the seeds of development, the fruits of which our progeny will also enjoy.