

WILDLIFE WELFARE AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Introduction

As per World Organization for Animal Health (OIE,2023), animal welfare is achieved when an animal is “healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe and able to express innate behavior.” Welfare frameworks focus on human treatment of animals rather than whether they should be used at all. Consequently, animal welfare focuses on improving quality of life for animals in agriculture, research, entertainment and as companions. Animal rights advocate for recognizing animals as emotional beings having intrinsic value independent of human utility. The animal rights philosophy, based on the ideas of thinkers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan, argues that animals have moral and legal entitlements to live free from human exploitation. This movement seeks to abolish practices such as animal testing, factory farming and exploitation for entertainment. In essence, while animal welfare emphasizes humane treatment, animal rights demand liberation from any form of human-induced suffering or ownership. Ethical treatment of animals is essential not only for moral and humanitarian reasons but also for ecological sustainability and public health. Compassionate interaction with animals reflects a society’s moral maturity and empathy. Ethically managed animal welfare improves food safety, biodiversity conservation, and disease prevention. In modern ethics, animals are increasingly viewed as sentient co-inhabitants of the planet rather than mere resources. This shift aligns with the global movement towards the “One Health” approach, integrating human, animal and environmental well-being.

Historical Background of Animal Welfare in India

India has a deep-rooted cultural tradition of compassion towards animals. Ancient texts such as the Rig Veda, Mahabharata and Jain Agamas reflect a moral responsibility to protect living beings (Ahimsa). The colonial period witnessed the formation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1861

in Calcutta, influenced by British humanitarian movements. Post independence, India enacted the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960), followed by the establishment of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) in 1962, marking a formal commitment to animal protection at the national level.

Current Status of Animal Welfare in India Today

India’s animal welfare framework operates under several legislations and policies includes:

1. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960
2. The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
3. The Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001
4. The Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023 (amended)

India is also committed to various international conventions promoting humane treatment of animals. Despite this, enforcement remains inconsistent due to socio economic disparities, lack of awareness and insufficient funding for animal welfare organizations. Nonetheless, non-governmental organizations such as Chittoor Animal Welfare Society (CAWS), PETA India, Blue Cross of India and FIAPO play critical roles in advocacy, rescue and education. Recent judicial interventions, such as the Animal Welfare Board of India vs. A. Nagaraja (2014) judgment have reinforced the constitutional duty of compassion towards animals, recognizing them as living beings entitled to dignity.

Laws Governing Animal Welfare in India

This framework extends from the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 to specialize wildlife and state-specific laws that uphold humane treatment, conservation and ethical coexistence.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (PCA Act) remains the primary legal framework protecting domestic and captive animals from abuse, neglect and inhumane

treatment. It aims to prevent the “infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering” on animals and establishes mechanisms for oversight and enforcement.

Key Provisions:

1. Section 3: Places a moral and legal duty on caretakers to ensure the well-being of animals.
2. Section 11: Defines specific acts of cruelty such as beating, overloading, starvation and neglect.
3. Section 22: Regulates the use of animals for performances.
4. Section 38: Authorizes the central government to create welfare rules and standards.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA) provides the statutory foundation for wildlife conservation in India. It categorizes species into schedules, each offering varying levels of protection.

Key Features

1. Schedules I & II: Provide the highest protection; violations lead to stringent penalties.
2. Schedule III & IV: Offer moderate protection.
3. Schedule V: Lists vermin species subject to state regulation.
4. Schedule VI: Protects specific plant species.
5. Provides for Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks and Conservation Reserves.

Recent Amendments: The 2022 amendment integrated the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) into Indian law, enhancing oversight of wildlife trade and trafficking.

Role of the Constitution and Judiciary India's Constitution explicitly recognizes animal

protection as a directive principle and a citizen's duty:

1. Article 48A: Mandates the state to safeguard wildlife and the environment.
2. Article 51A(g): Imposes a duty on citizens to show compassion toward living creatures.
3. Article 21: Judicially interpreted to include animal rights within the right to life and dignity.

Penalties, Prosecutions,

Penalties

1. Under PCA Act (Section 11):
 - a. First offense: Fine ₹10–₹50.
 - b. Subsequent offense: Fine up to ₹100 or imprisonment up to 3 months.
2. Under WPA (Section 51):

For protected species

Imprisonment up to 7 years and/or fine up to ₹25,000. Reform proposals recommend increasing fines to ₹75,000 and imprisonment up to 5 years for severe cruelty.

Conclusion

The Animal Welfare Board of India signifies the moral and administrative backbone of country's animal welfare movement. From shaping humane policies to supporting shelters and promoting public awareness, its influence extends across legal, educational, and ethical dimensions. The Board's collaborative approach with NGOs, state governments, and civil society demonstrates that animal welfare is not merely an act of kindness—it is a constitutional and moral imperative for a compassionate nation.

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