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A REPORT
ON THE NATIONAL PARKS AND WILD LIFE
SANCTUARIES (EQUIVALENT RESERVES) OF INDIA

Written for the Government of India, for the First
World Conference on National Parks, by E.P.Gee (Member,
Executive Committee, Indian Board for Wild Life).

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(EQUIVALENT RESERVES) OF INDIA

Written for the Government of India, for the First World Conference on National Parks, by E. P. Gee (Member, Executive Committee, Indian Board for Wild Life).

1. ABSTRACT

Something very akin to the modern 'national park idea' is to be found in the historical literature of India of the period 300 B.C. to 242 B.C. The first national park to be created in modern times was in 1935, and three more have been constituted since 1955. A number of very fine wild life sanctuaries are on the verge of being up-graded into national parks.

National parks and sanctuaries in India are a State concern, and do not come under the Union Government; but provision is being made to ensure their national character so that they may rank among the world's finest national parks. They come under the jurisdiction of the Forest Departments of the States of the Indian Union.

National parks and sanctuaries in India generally follow the same pattern and are founded on the same principles as in western countries, subject to modifications dictated by conditions peculiar to India. A 'Definition' of a national park has been officially adopted in India, and a set of 'Standards' has been drafted and awaits finalization.

The purposes, principles and policies of national parks in India, as expressed and implied in the 'Definition' and 'Standards' are mainly the conservation of the indigenous wild life in its natural habitat and the natural scenic beauty. Concentrated visitor use is encouraged within the limits of availability of accommodation, transport and the security of the wild life itself.

Plans for the future include the up-grading of the more important sanctuaries to become national parks, and the joint development financially of these national parks by the Union and State Governments. The importance of education throughout the country is fully realized, to ensure the fullest understanding and appreciation of the values of national parks and their optimum use. Both home and foreign tourism is being encouraged and stepped up to the greatest possible degree.

A system of 'Information Tables' for national parks has been devised and officially adopted in India, and is recommended for world-wide adoption and use. Nomenclature and terminology have received full attention, and a publication on this subject is being printed.

The first national park to be created in India was the Hailey National Park in the (then) United Provinces in 1935. The International Conference for the Protection of African Fauna and Flora held in London in 1933 was followed by a national one in India in 1935 -- the All-India Conference for the Protection of Wild Life, sponsored by the Association for the Preservation of Game in the United Provinces and largely inspired by Jim Corbett of subsequent literary fame. The name 'Hailey National Park' became changed in 1956 to 'Corbett National Park' by the Uttar Pradesh Government as a memorial to Jim Corbett, whose home had been in those parts and who had so nobly championed the cause of India's wild life in his world-famous books.

Closely connected with the development of the national park idea in India is the recent post-Independence revival of interest in wild life preservation and creation of national parks which accompanied the formation in 1952 of the Indian Board for Wild Life. At its inaugural session at Mysore the National Parks Sub-Committee drafted a 'Definition' of national parks for use in India.

The position in 1962 with regard to the creation of national parks in India is that in addition to the Corbett Park, there are now three more: these are Kanha National Park and Shivpuri National Park (in Madhya Pradesh), and Hazaribagh National Park (in Bihar). Several sanctuaries are expected to be upgraded in the near future to become national parks: these include Gir Forest (in Gujarat), Jaldapara (in Bengal), Kaziranga and Manas (in Assam), Bandipur (in Mysore), Mudumalai (in Madras) and Periyar (in Kerala).

3. PRESENT ADMINISTRATION

Under the new Indian Constitution forests, wild life, parks, sanctuaries and kindred matters are a State subject and are not on the Central or Concurrent List. There are no national forests or national lands belonging to the Central or Union Government in India. It follows, therefore, that any legislation to constitute national parks will be done by the Legislatures of the State Governments of the Indian Union. In order to ensure that national parks created by a State Government may have a 'national' character and be worthy of the designation 'national' park, the Union Government has recommended to all State Governments that a Model Bill for the Constitution of National Parks, finalized in 1957, should form the basis of any legislation the States may enact in this matter. It is also recommended by the Union Government that a national park to be constituted by a State Government should attain certain 'Standards' which are at present being finalized. It is also recommended that such parks be dedicated by a State for use for national purposes and that the control of such a park be put on a national basis, or at least that the centre be in some way associated with the control of such a park, so that it can become a 'national' park in the fullest sense of the term.

Also, as some of these parks and sanctuaries are situated in or are part of larger valuable timber-forests, and as India cannot afford to forego the revenue from the timber of these places, forest operations, plantations and timber extraction based on a scientific Working Plan take place. In order to counter-act the disturbance that might be caused by such forest operations, it is laid down that there should be 'inner sanctuaries' of suitable size where there will be no exploitation of forest produce and where wild animal and plant life will remain unspoilt and undisturbed.

Some States of India are more progressive than others, and their programme of constituting one or more national parks in their areas is in advance of other States. Consequently a sanctuary in one State may not be inferior in character or visitor-use than a national park in another.

The national parks and sanctuaries of India have a fascination and character of their very own. In many of them, can be found the distinctive Indian fauna - with the additional attraction of the scenic beauty of fine forests, clear flowing rivers and lofty mountains.

5. STANDARDS FOR NATIONAL PARKS IN INDIA

In wild life conservation in general, and in the concept of national parks in particular, India conforms to the internationally accepted principles to the greatest possible degree. But peculiar local conditions often make it necessary for India to adapt or modify principles which are accepted in a country of, say, North America.

A set of Standards has been drawn up and is at present still being finalized in India. These Standards in their unfinalized form are as follows:

1. DEFINITION.

National parks are areas 'DEDICATED BY STATUTE FOR ALL TIME, TO CONSERVE THE SCENERY AND LAND AND HISTORICAL OBJECTS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, TO CONSERVE WILD LIFE THEREIN AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF THE SAME IN SUCH MANNER AND BY SUCH MEANS AS WILL LEAVE THEM UNIMPAIRED FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS, WITH SUCH MODIFICATIONS AS LOCAL CONDITIONS MAY DEMAND'.

From this 'Definition', passed at the inaugural session of the Indian Board for Wild Life in 1952, it follows:

1. That national parks must be areas of national significance to India as a whole, and of importance to the rest of the world, and not ~~areas~~ of mere local significance.
2. That the natural scenic beauty of the area must be carefully preserved so that it will remain unspoilt and unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. This means that there should be no forest operations such as the extraction of timber and planting of plantations in a national park, unless they can be justified on the basis of the very pressing economic needs of the country. In areas of outstanding

beauty or holding valuable fauna where it may not be possible to forego such forest operations (where they are already being done), the natural scenic beauty should be preserved as far as possible, and certain areas should be left strictly protected as 'inner sanctuaries' or abhayaranya.

3. That the existing and indigenous wild life of the area must be strictly preserved, for the enjoyment of future generations. This implies that no 'foreign' or exotic species of fauna or flora should be introduced, though a species which once existed in the area and has within historical times become extinct can be re-introduced, if an expert ecological study of the area favours such a step. A national park may preserve either rare and valuable species of fauna in danger of extinction, or typical fauna representative of the region, or a combination of both.

4. That development of the area must be carefully planned and executed so as to provide for its enjoyment by the public and by foreign visitors in such a way as to leave the natural scenic beauty and wild life unimpaired for future generations. This means that access roads should be made, and roads and paths inside the park for the use of visitors. And that rest houses and such suitable accommodation should be provided. And that motor transport, riding elephants, boats and so forth be provided as local conditions may demand.

5. That national parks, wherever possible, must be of such size as to make them viable and ecological units, and comprehensive units embracing the amount of territory required for effective administration and for the continuance of the representative fauna and flora.

II. LEGISLATION.

As wild life is a State subject, the legislation for the creation of parks will be enacted by the State Legislatures concerned. It is considered advisable that there should be a separate Act of the State Legislature for each park, and not a general Act or an enabling Act for several parks. It is recommended that the model bill, as drawn up by the Indian Board for Wild Life and approved of by the Law Ministry, should be used as a basis for any State legislation, in order to ensure uniformity and an all-India character in the parks of the country.

As the term 'national' has a country-wide, all-India significance, it is recommended to State Governments that the standards as laid down should be strictly adhered to, and that the approval of the Indian Board for Wild Life be obtained before designating a park as a national park. A park in a State can then be dedicated to the nation, and become a national park. Existing national parks in the country which are up to the standards laid down should remain as originally constituted.

III. ADMINISTRATION

In administering national parks it is recommended:

1. That for each national park, or for the national parks of each State, there should be a Management or Advisory Board or Committee consisting of members of the Government and Forest Department, eminent conservationists, representatives of public interests and so on. At any time considered desirable, the advice of the Indian Board for Wild Life should be sought.
2. That national parks be administered with the primary objective of conserving the scenic beauty and wild life in their natural state, and of preserving and safeguarding all objects within them. And that management, control, modifications and other such human intervention be done only under expert advice and in conformity with the standards as laid down.
3. That, wherever possible, buffer-belts or buffer zones of sufficient width be constituted outside the boundaries of national parks, in order to ensure their inviolability -- especially against poaching, grazing by domestic cattle, cattle-borne diseases, cutting of vegetation and so on. Shooting in these buffer areas should be rigidly controlled.
4. That undesirable commercial activities and non-conforming recreational activities be avoided, as violations of the standards as laid down. Fishing with rod and line for sport, subject to local regulations, is permissible in national parks.
5. That carefully planned and restricted forest operations be permitted only when there are over-riding reasons, to justify them, such as the pressing economic need for timber and the revenue derived from it. In such cases steps must be taken to preserve the scenic beauty and to set aside preservation plots, inner sanctuaries or abhayaranya.
6. That roads and paths be constructed to enable visitors to see and enjoy the scenic beauty and wild life and for the purpose of administering and protecting the area, with the least interference with the natural scenery.
7. That buildings for accommodation of visitors and staff be constructed, but that they be as unobtrusive as possible and in harmony with their surroundings. While luxury for visitors is not recommended or desirable, there should be a high standard of the basic requirements of the present day traveller. Special sites may be allocated for visitors who wish to camp inside a national park.
8. That appropriate steps be taken to provide publicity to attract visitors from within the country and tourists from abroad. In addition, full information on each park should be available in the form of a well illustrated booklet, which will be of use not only to visitors but also for educational purposes. The services of guides should be available, if required by foreign visitors. Picture postcards and other mementoes should be available for sale, if there is a demand for them.
9. That every step taken in the development and use of national parks conforms to the standards, so that the area may be left unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. If ever any doubt may arise, the ultimate interests of the people of the whole country and of future generations should be taken into account.

6. PURPOSES, PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES.

The main purpose of national parks and sanctuaries in India is the preservation of wild animal life in general and of endangered species such as Indian lion and Indian rhinoceros in their natural habitat in particular. Together with wild animal life, the plant life and natural scenic beauty are also preserved; and only in some parks of these States, where the over-riding economic needs of the country must prevail, is the exploitation of forest produce allowed.

Coincidental with the preservation of animal and plant life in many cases is the protection of river catchment areas and watersheds and the prevention of erosion by modern methods of soil conservation.

The principles on which wild life conservation and national park administration are based are expressed or implied in the 'Definitions' and in the 'Standards', with the object of ensuring the survival for future generations of the country's rich and varied fauna and flora and her human history and spirit.

The policy of the Government of India and of the States of the Indian Union is to fulfil the purposes and abide by the principles laid down in the 'Definitions' and 'Standards' as far as is possible within the financial resources available. The claims of cultivators for land for increased food supply, and the pressure of domestic cattle owners for more grazing areas have to be patiently and firmly restrained in view of the need for national parks as a measure of wise land use. It has also been the policy to develop both home and foreign tourism to the greatest possible extent consistent with availability of visitor accommodation, transport and security of the wild life itself.

7. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

The procedure has been for the States to draw up their plans for the development and administration of their parks and sanctuaries. When these plans are finalised and approved, the Union Government contributes 50% of the costs consistent with availability of finance within the budget of the Plans.

Rs. 18.08 million have been ~~allocated~~ allocated for this purpose in the Third Plan (now in progress); the exact amounts spent in the earlier Plans are not readily separable from the total expenditure on forestry projects in general.

It is planned that the more important sanctuaries will be upgraded to become national parks, so that all the finest localities for wild life and for scenic beauty will become national parks and that there will be at least one national park in each State.

It is proposed that scientifically planned ecological studies be carried out of the Indian rhinoceros, Indian lion, wild buffalo and other rare species in their type-habitants. Exactly who will do these studies and from where the finance will come is not certain: there is opportunity for more developed countries to render assistance in this respect.

It is recognised that education in the need for nature conservation and appreciation of the countryside and its beauties is of tantamount importance. This is to some degree being done, but a great deal more is necessary in this sphere, in order to bring about a proper realization of the cultural, scientific, recreational, inspirational and economic advantages of national parks, for the people of India and also for all mankind.

Tourism is now the fifth largest earner of foreign exchange in India, and the importance of wild life and national parks in the development of the foreign tourist traffic is fully realised. Plans are in operation to endeavour to increase the flow of tourists from other countries to visit and enjoy the magnificent wild life heritage of India.

8. INFORMATION TABLES ON NATIONAL PARKS.

It is particularly important to know the best times of the year for visiting national parks. In many parts of the world including India, there are certain rainy seasons, certain seasons of intense heat and so on, which people are well advised to avoid if they can. These 'seasons' vary considerably --- even from place to place in the same country; and unless one can find out beforehand the climatic conditions of each place in each month of the year, it is impossible to plan one's tour with an assurance that one is making the best of one's limited time.

India has devised a system of 'Information Tables' which gives in compressed and tabulated form just what is wanted. A glance at the 'table' for each place shows exactly what the weather conditions, temperature and so on will be in each month of the year. Other items of interest to visitors are also given, such as best times for seeing and photographing wild life, seeing spring flowers, enjoying autumnal conditions, fishing and so on.

For example, it is no use visitors going to the Corbett National Park (in Uttar Pradesh) during the months of June to November, for this park is then quite inaccessible owing to monsoon rains. March and April are the best months for this place, while January, February and May are also good, and December is possible if the roads are open then. On the other hand June to October are the best months for visiting Dachigam Sanctuary (in Kashmir). And the bird sanctuary of Ranganthittoo is at its best in July and August, Keoladeo Ghana in August and September, and Vedanthangal in December, January and February.

Consequently in India each month of the year at each place is given a rating or index number. The best months are rated at 5, and the worst at 1. The rating 0 means that the place cannot be visited at all at that time. These ratings are as follows:-

- 5 Best time of all.
- 4 Nearly as good.
- 3. Alright, but less good.
- 2 Possible, but not fully recommended.
- 1 Just possible at times, not recommended.
- 0 Impossible, or not allowed, or closed.

From the maximum and minimum temperatures and brief notes on weather conditions the traveller knows what to expect and what clothing etc. to take with him. Each place has its own 'Information Table'. As an example, the 'table' for Kaziranga Sanctuary is given here:-

KAZIRANGA SANCTUARY

Altitude 250 feet above seal level.

Rainfall 80 inches per annum.

MONTH	INDEX	WEATHER	TEMPERATURE		REMARKS
			Max.	Min.	
January	4	Fine, cool	75	45	Early morning mists. Dry. Afternoon visits recommended.
February	5	Fine, cool	80	55	Grass being burnt off. Best time.
March	5	-do-	85	60	Grass burnt off. Best time.
April	4	Showers, warm	90	65	Now grass growing up. Good time.
May	3	Rains	95	70	Conditions uncertain. Alright if dry.
June	2	-do-	95	75	Only small areas at Kohora and Laodubi can be visited
July	2	-do-	95	75	ditto
August	2	-do-	95	75	ditto
September	2	-do-	95	75	ditto
October	3	-do-	95	65	ditto. Conditions getting better.
November	4	Fine, cool	85	55	Swamps boggy, grass high in places. Good time for photography.
December	4	-do-	75	48	Early morning mists. Drier. Afternoon visits recommended

In addition, for each country a comprehensive 'table' is needed including all the places for which individual tables have been published. From this comprehensive 'table' giving the rating of each month, one can plan one's itinerary to include a number of places which are at their best, or nearly at their best, at any given time of the year. Thus frustration and disappointment will be avoided. As an example of this, the comprehensive table of India's national parks and sanctuaries is given here:-

INDIA'S WILD LIFE SANCTUARIES

MONTH	Gir Forest	Dachigam	Corbett Park 1	Chandraprabha	Kanha Park 2	Shivpuri Park 3	Hazaribagh Park 4	Jaldapa	Kaziranga	Manas	Bandipur	Ranganthittoo	Mudumalai	Vedanthangal	Periyar	Keoladeo Ghana
January	5	1	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	4	5	5	2
February	5	1	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	2	5	4	5	2
March	5	3	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	2	5	3	5	1
April	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	2	5	2	4	1
May	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	2	3	2	5	1	4	1
June	3	5	0	3	4	4	3	2	2	1	4	4	3	0	3	1
July	1	5	0	3	1	5	2	1	2	1	3	5	2	0	2	4
August	1	5	0	2	0	4	2	1	2	1	3	5	2	1	2	5
September	1	5	0	2	0	4	2	1	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	5
October	2	5	0	3	0	4	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	5
November	3	3	1	3	1	4	3	3	4	5	4	2	4	4	3	2
December	4	1	2	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	4	5	4	2

1 2 3 4 - National Parks

At first sight some people might offer the criticism that such a system would lead to over-crowding of visitors during the peak months. This is not so. For if it was likely to lead to over-crowding during any month (or months), it could be mentioned in the 'Remarks' column of any such month 'Greatest number of visitors at this time', or 'Coincides with school holiday', or whatever is applicable. And in the 'Remarks' column of previous or subsequent months it could be mentioned 'Fewer visitors, and therefore quieter'. These remarks, combined with other items of interest in the 'Remarks' column, would actually lead to a levelling out of the busy periods of the year, and to an avoidance of crowds.

This system of 'Information Tables' has already been officially adopted by the Indian Board for wild life and by the States throughout India, and is utilised in full in the guide booklet 'WILD LIFE SANCTUARIES IN INDIA'. Such a scheme of 'Information Tables' is not only advisable but absolutely necessary if travellers are to be saved unnecessary response, disappointment and frustration. If this system could be standardised and universally adopted throughout the world, in all guide books and leaflets, there is no doubt that the worries and disappointments both of visitors and also of administrators of national parks and sanctuaries would be greatly diminished.

9. NOMENCLATURE AND TERMINOLOGY.

A 'GLOSSARY OF NATURE CONSERVATION AND WILD LIFE MANAGEMENT TERMINOLOGY FOR USE IN INDIA' has been compiled and is now being printed. The terms and nomenclature widely used in other countries have been included, as well as those regularly in use in India. This Glossary is intended for use in India only, where much diversity of peoples and climate has tended to produce slightly diverging lines of thought and expression. It is hoped that all States of the Indian Union will follow this. Some of the nomenclature used in India differs from that of other countries: for example a 'reserve' in India is 'reserved forest or an area in which wild life is protected, by being so constituted under the Indian Forest Act or other forest law', while in western countries it is something totally different.

It is also felt that this Glossary would be of use to foreign visitors who come to India to see her national parks and sanctuaries. Furthermore it is felt that if all countries were to produce such a Glossary for their own countries as this one, then it would be only one step further to make an attempt at international level to frame a standardized terminology and nomenclature for all countries.

10. LITERATURE

The output of publications on national parks and sanctuaries in India is so far small. The following relevant booklets have been published or are being printed:

WILD LIFE SANCTUARIES IN INDIA, by E. P. Gee for the Department of Tourism, Government of India, New Delhi, 1961.

A GLOSSARY OF NATURE CONSERVATION AND WILD LIFE MANAGEMENT TERMINOLOGY FOR USE IN INDIA, by E. P. Gee for the Indian Board for Wild Life, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, (now being printed).

WILD LIFE IN INDIA AND ITS MANAGEMENT, by P. D. Stracey for the Indian Board for Wild Life, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, (now being printed).