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Investigative Challenges in Wildlife Crime Enforcement: A Critical Study on Procedural and Institutional Gaps in India

SHRISTY PRADHAN* AND DEBADUTTA KANUNGO**

ABSTRACT

Wildlife crimes have emerged as a serious threat to biodiversity and environmental governance in India. Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, the effective investigation and prosecution of wildlife offences continue to face significant practical and procedural challenges. Unlike conventional crime cases, wildlife offences often begin with seizure or apprehension before the formal registration of the offence, creating procedural ambiguities in investigation. This paper examines the key challenges encountered in wildlife crime investigation, including difficulties in search and seizure, the detection of crime, the preparation of the offence report, forensic examination, and the maintenance of the chain of custody. The study adopts an empirical and doctrinal approach, drawing upon field-based observation from practical engagement with forest field officials and wildlife crime investigation. This paper argues that strengthening wildlife law enforcement requires not only strong statutory provisions but also institutional reform and greater judicial and administrative sensitisation to the unique nature of wildlife offences.

Keywords: Investigation, Wildlife Crime, Seizure, Search, Evidence, Arrest.

I. INTRODUCTION

The expression “wild life” was initially written as two separate words and is credited to the American zoologist William Temple Hornaday, who used the term in his 1913 publication *Our Vanishing Wild Life: Its Extermination and Preservation*. Over time, particularly during the 1930s,¹ the spelling evolved into the single word “wildlife,” which subsequently gained common acceptance. In general understanding, wildlife refers to the naturally occurring plant and animal species of a particular region. Statutorily, Section 2(37) of the Wild Life (Protection)

* Author is a Research Scholar at P.G. Department of Law, Sambalpur University, Odisha, India and Legal Advisor at Jharsuguda Forest Department, Odisha, India.

** Author is a Research Scholar at P.G. Department of Law, Sambalpur University, Odisha, India and Advocate at Supreme Court of India.

¹ WILLIAM T. HORNADAY, *OUR VANISHING WILD LIFE: ITS EXTERMINATION AND PRESERVATION* (1913).

Act, 1972 defines “wildlife” to include all animals as well as aquatic and terrestrial vegetation that constitute part of a habitat.²

The importance of wildlife conservation can be understood within the framework of the Constitution of India. The Constitution recognises the State’s obligation under Article 48A (Directive Principles of State Policy), which provides that the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country,³ and it imposes a fundamental duty under Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties), which provides that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.⁴ It can thus be derived that environmental protection is not only a State obligation but also a civic one.

Wildlife crime can be understood as the killing, poisoning, trapping, snaring, or capturing of wildlife, or the trade or movement of articles derived from wildlife, in contravention of international, regional, or national laws. The infliction of cruelty on any free-living or captive wild animal is also a crime. Although wild animals and plants are the immediate victims of wildlife crime, the consequences of such activity extend far beyond individual harm: they disrupt the ecology of the area and affect the wider environment. The constitutional framework of India recognises the protection of wildlife as a matter of national importance, treating it as part of the country’s natural heritage and collective wealth.

While legislation has focused mostly on increasing penalties and expanding protected areas, relatively less scholarly attention has been devoted to the procedural and investigative flaws that compromise enforcement. The success of wildlife conservation law depends not only on statutory prohibition but also on the quality, legality, and scientific validity of criminal investigation. In practice, wildlife crime investigations frequently suffer from procedural irregularities, weak evidentiary documentation, inadequate forensic support, and institutional capacity constraints. These deficiencies often lead to acquittals and lengthy trials.⁵ The investigative framework for wildlife offences thus poses distinct structural challenges.

A. Objective of the Study

This study aims to critically examine the investigative challenges in wildlife crime, with particular focus on the procedural, legal, and field-level constraints faced by enforcement

² The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, No. 53, Acts of Parliament, 1972, § 2(37) (India).

³ INDIA CONST. art. 48A (ins. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, § 10, w.e.f. Jan. 3, 1977).

⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 51A, cl. (g).

⁵ Ajay Kumar Rana & Nishant Kumar, *Current Wildlife Crime (Indian Scenario): Major Challenges and Prevention Approaches* (2023) (PMCID: PMC10025790).

agencies. The specific objectives are as follows: to analyse the unique nature of wildlife crime investigation and how it differs from conventional criminal investigation, particularly in terms of detection, seizure, and initial proceedings; to examine the challenges faced during a wildlife crime investigation, including issues arising from remote locations, the lack of informants, and organised illegal trade networks; to study the difficulty in search and seizure operations, especially the absence of independent witnesses and improper documentation; to assess the challenges in the collection, preservation, and forensic examination of wildlife evidence, including chain-of-custody issues, the lack of forensic infrastructure, and the technical complexity of wildlife articles; and to examine the role and limitations of veterinary and forensic experts in wildlife crime investigation, particularly in remote areas.

B. Methodology

The present study adopts an empirical as well as a doctrinal research methodology to examine the investigative challenges in wildlife crime. The doctrinal component involves an analysis of the statutory provisions and rules governing wildlife protection and criminal procedure. Secondary sources such as books, articles, journals, and reports have been consulted to provide a comprehensive framework.

An empirical study was undertaken to understand the practical dimension of wildlife crime investigation. The author and co-author undertook a legal research internship at the Sambalpur Forest Division, Odisha, which provided first-hand exposure to the functioning of forest law enforcement mechanisms. During the internship, the researchers engaged with field officers to understand the procedural aspects of investigation, documentation, and prosecution.

The study also draws upon participant observation, in which the author and co-author observed ongoing wildlife offence cases and related proceedings. This enabled a deeper understanding of ground-level challenges in detection, search and seizure, the preparation of offence reports, and evidence handling. The researchers further conducted and participated in training sessions for the forest department, focusing on investigation technique and the proper documentation of prosecution reports. This interaction contributed valuable practical insights into procedural inconsistencies. The methodology thus combines theoretical analysis with empirical observation.

C. Research Questions

The study is guided by two research questions. First, how do procedural ambiguities arising from the overlap between the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and general criminal procedure laws affect the investigation and prosecution of wildlife offences in India? Second, what

institutional, forensic, and field-level constraints hinder the effective investigation of wildlife crime, and how can these challenges be addressed through legal and administrative mechanisms?

II. INVESTIGATIVE CHALLENGES IN WILDLIFE CRIME

A. Challenges in the Detection of a Wildlife Crime

The detection of a wildlife crime is the first and arguably the most critical stage in the enforcement process. Unlike conventional crime, where an offence is typically reported by a victim or discovered through routine policing, wildlife crime often remains concealed and occurs in ecologically sensitive areas with little or no human presence. This inherent invisibility makes detection extremely difficult and results in a significant number of offences going undetected or unreported. Under Section 50 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 the power to enter, search, and arrest is provided,⁶ and the procedure was provided previously under Section 100 of the Code of Criminal Procedure⁷ and now under Section 103 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.⁸ A significant legal challenge in wildlife crime investigation arises from the overlap and divergence between the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Wild Life (Protection) Act. In *Moti Lal v. Central Bureau of Investigation* it was held that the provisions of the Code generally apply unless expressly excluded by a special law.⁹ However, the Wild Life (Protection) Act creates a distinct procedural framework, leading to ambiguity in practice. Under the Code or the BNSS, investigation typically begins with the registration of a FIR under Section 154¹⁰ and Section 173(1)¹¹ respectively, followed by search, seizure, and arrest.¹² In contrast, under Section 50 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, forest officers are empowered to conduct search, seizure, and arrest without a warrant, and proceedings begin with a seizure report or offence report rather than the lodging of a FIR. Forest officers are trained mainly in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and do not strictly follow the Code or the BNSS. One primary challenge in wildlife crime detection is that the victim, the wildlife, cannot report the offence, and local communities are either unaware of the offence or unwilling to report it, since wildlife offences do not affect the public at large and so people do not voluntarily come

⁶ The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, No. 53, Acts of Parliament, 1972, § 50 (India).

⁷ The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 1974, § 100 (India).

⁸ The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, No. 46, Acts of Parliament, 2023, § 103 (India).

⁹ *Moti Lal v. Central Bureau of Investigation*, (2002) 9 S.C.C. 697.

¹⁰ The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 1974, § 154 (India).

¹¹ The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, No. 46, Acts of Parliament, 2023, § 173(1) (India).

¹² WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL BUREAU, WILDLIFE CRIME INVESTIGATION: A HANDBOOK FOR WILDLIFE CRIME INVESTIGATION OFFICERS (Ministry of Env't & Forests 2013).

forward.¹³ In many instances, the local populace near forest areas is economically backward and dependent upon forest produce, and may be indirectly involved in poaching, the timber trade, or other wildlife crime for sustenance, with the result that such crimes are rarely brought to the attention of the authorities.

Forest departments often face a shortage of staff, vehicles, surveillance equipment, and modern technology, reducing their ability to monitor vast areas effectively. Seasonal variations such as the monsoon also contribute to inadequate patrolling and hinder surveillance, giving offenders the opportunity to commit wildlife crime with minimal risk of detection. Another factor contributing to inefficient detection is the lack of reliable intelligence. Unlike conventional crime, where criminal intelligence networks are relatively well established, the wildlife crime intelligence network is underdeveloped. Informers in wildlife crime are fewer and often unreliable, owing to fear of retaliation or a lack of incentives.

B. Challenges in Search and Seizure

The stage immediately following detection is the search and seizure process, one of the most critical yet complex stages of enforcement. Unlike conventional crime investigations, which are largely conducted in controlled or organised urban environments, wildlife offences are typically detected in remote forest areas, protected reserves, border zones, coastal regions, or clandestine transit routes.¹⁴ These areas pose inherent logistical constraints, including difficult terrain and a lack of transport and communication infrastructure, so that forest field staff are required to perform their investigative duties under physically demanding and time-sensitive conditions.

Under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, before making a search the officer or other person about to make it must call upon two or more independent and respectable inhabitants of the locality in which the place to be searched is situated, or of any other locality if no such inhabitant is available or willing, to attend and witness the search, and may issue a written order to them to do so.¹⁵ A major evidentiary challenge arises where there is a lack of independent witnesses. In conventional crime, the presence of independent or neutral witnesses during search and seizure enhances the credibility and admissibility of evidence.¹⁶ However, in wildlife crime, especially deep inside forest areas or in sparsely populated regions, securing independent witnesses is often impracticable. In some cases, even when local inhabitants are present, they may be unwilling to cooperate due to fear of reprisals from organised poaching

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Soutik Banerjee, *Constitutional Principles Go for a Toss in the Criminal Law of Search and Seizure* (Dec. 13, 2023).

¹⁵ The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, No. 46, Acts of Parliament, 2023, § 103(4) (India).

¹⁶ WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL BUREAU, *supra* note 12.

networks or due to their own indirect involvement in illegal activities. This creates an evidentiary gap that is frequently exploited by the defence at trial to question the authenticity of the seizure process. As wildlife crime occurs in dense forest areas, conducting an on-the-spot seizure and drafting the seizure list become an ordeal: there is always the possibility of a sudden encounter with a wild animal, weather conditions may be unfavourable and may tamper with the evidence, and individuals involved in crimes such as poaching are often armed with country-made rifles, while forest officers are unarmed, so that there is a constant risk of attack by habitual offenders in remote areas where help cannot arrive in time.¹⁷

During the seizure of uncured wild meat, although forest personnel are trained and have expertise in identifying wild animal species, they frequently face significant difficulty when identification must be made solely on the basis of raw meat. It becomes difficult to distinguish wild meat from domesticated meat when it is found in raw, washed, or processed form, which is often the case during seizures. Taking advantage of such situations, offenders often claim that the meat in their possession is from a domesticated animal, placing officials in a difficult position.¹⁸ If the position is later proven otherwise, such action can lead to resentment and distrust among the local population. This issue is further compounded by the fact that many forest personnel live within or near these communities. The risk of social backlash or hostility makes field staff cautious, highlighting the need for better identification tools and support systems to ensure both effective enforcement and officer safety.

C. Registration of an Offence Report

The registration of the offence report in wildlife crime cases presents a distinct procedural challenge, primarily due to its divergence from the framework governing conventional criminal investigation. Under Section 173(1) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, a police officer investigating a cognizable offence is required to formally register a First Information Report (FIR), which marks the commencement of investigation. In conventional crime, this sequence is well established: registration of the FIR precedes investigation, and recovery of material evidence such as weapons, stolen property, or vehicles typically follows. However, wildlife crime investigations operate on a fundamentally different procedural logic. In most cases, detection occurs in the field, where forest officers first encounter the offence, leading to the immediate seizure of wildlife articles or the apprehension of suspects. Consequently, investigation effectively begins prior to formal case registration. In practice, this initial report

¹⁷ Maitri Sutariya, 6(4) INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES 1673 (2023).

¹⁸ *Id.*

is referred to by different names across States, such as Preliminary Offence Report (POR), Offence Report, H-2 Case, Seizure Intimation, or even FIR. This lack of uniformity creates confusion not only at the administrative level but also within the judiciary.¹⁹ Unlike a police FIR, which is registered under a standardised statutory procedure, these reports are prepared by forest officers exercising power under Section 50(4) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

A significant challenge arises from the judicial perception of such reports. Judicial officers unfamiliar with wildlife laws sometimes question their legitimacy, treating them as procedurally inferior to FIRs registered by the police. There have been instances where magistrates have refused to accept offence reports.

The legal position has, however, been clarified in judicial pronouncements. In *Sampanna Mutalik v. State of Karnataka*,²⁰ the Karnataka High Court recognised the distinct nature of wildlife crime investigation and observed that seizure or apprehension may precede formal registration of the case, and that investigation can validly commence with the submission of a seizure or offence report before the magistrate by an investigating officer. This reinforces the statutory framework under wildlife law, which differs from general criminal procedure.²¹

Despite such clarity, the absence of uniform nomenclature and a standardised format continues to create practical difficulties. In essence, the core challenge lies in reconciling two parallel procedural systems: one under general criminal law requiring FIR-based initiation, and the other under special wildlife legislation allowing investigation to commence from seizure and apprehension.

D. Challenges in the Collection of Evidence and Forensic Examination

The collection of evidence from a crime scene is the backbone of any successful criminal investigation. In wildlife crime, however, this is the most challenging and multifaceted task, and it significantly affects the quality of investigation and the prospect of conviction. Wildlife offences rely heavily on circumstantial, biological, and scientific evidence requiring specialised handling and interpretation.²²

One of the primary challenges lies in the nature of the crime scene. As discussed, wildlife offences occur in remote forest areas where environmental conditions are unpredictable and often hostile. Evidence such as weapons, bloodstains, footprints, carcasses, and traps may be

¹⁹ WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL BUREAU, *supra* note 12.

²⁰ *Sampanna Mutalik v. State of Karnataka*, ILR 2008 Kar. 4435.

²¹ *Id.*

²² WILDLIFE INSTITUTE OF INDIA, GUIDELINES FOR WILDLIFE FORENSIC INVESTIGATION AND DNA SAMPLING (Dehradun).

exposed to the weather, to scavenging animals, or to natural decomposition, leading to degradation. Delay in reaching the site, owing to uneven terrain, delayed detection, or a lack of mobility, results in tampered, lost, or contaminated evidence.

Another issue is the lack of a proper evidence-collection protocol at the field level. The forest field staff who are the first responders are not adequately trained to collect evidence in a scientific manner, and improper handling of evidence and samples occurs at the crime scene. Field staff often do not possess the right equipment, such as gloves and sampling jars, needed for the collection of evidence. Improper handling compromises the integrity of the evidence.²³

The technical complexity of wildlife evidence further complicates matters. Unlike conventional objects, wildlife articles such as meat, bone, and other derivatives or processed products require specialised expert identification. Identifying a species from its bone, skin, or powdered form is not possible through visual inspection alone; it necessitates forensic analysis, including DNA profiling, microscopic examination, or chemical examination.²⁴ At present, access to wildlife forensic facilities in India remains limited and unevenly distributed. In Odisha, for instance, the Centre for Wildlife Health is present only in Bhubaneswar, which is geographically distant from many districts. This results in delays in sample submission, testing, and the receipt of reports, and improper preservation during transit or prolonged storage occurs in several cases. Prolonged storage before analysis leads to degradation of biological material, rendering it unsuitable for testing.

The absence of decentralised forensic facilities at the district level further exacerbates these challenges, as field officers are compelled to rely on distant laboratories, leading to logistical bottlenecks and overburdening of the facility. The Block Veterinary Officer (BVO) is often not competent to identify wild species, either lacking the required facility or, more usually, treating domesticated animals and lacking expertise in wild species.²⁵ Another significant practical difficulty is the availability of a BVO at the crime scene, especially in remote forest areas. Ideally, a veterinary officer should visit the spot, examine the carcass or animal article, and collect samples at the spot, which are then packed properly and sent to forensic laboratories. However, due to distance, workload, and logistical constraints, BVOs are often unable to reach the spot.²⁶ Consequently, the field staff transport the seized material, with improper handling,

²³ NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY, STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR INVESTIGATION OF WILDLIFE CRIME.

²⁴ K. MATHIHARAN & AMRIT K. PATNAIK, *MODI'S MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE AND TOXICOLOGY* (2016).

²⁵ CENTRAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, *CRIME MANUAL*.

²⁶ Rana & Kumar, *supra* note 5.

from the scene of crime to the range office, where sampling is often conducted by the BVO. This leads to the evidence becoming contaminated.²⁷

E. Challenges Related to the Chain of Custody

Maintaining the chain of custody is one of the most critical aspects of a wildlife crime investigation. The chain of custody refers to the continuous and documented control, transfer, and handling of evidence from the moment it is seized until it is produced before the court of law. A common issue in practice is the lack of uniform documentation protocols. Seizure memos, sample-forwarding letters, storage registers (also known as the malkhana register), and laboratory receipts are not properly maintained. Multiple samples are handled together without proper segregation or identification marks, increasing the possibility of mix-ups.

Courts attach great significance to the integrity of the chain of custody; even minor inconsistencies, such as missing signatures, unexplained delays, or discrepancies in sample labelling, can be used by the defence to cast doubt on the prosecution case.

F. Challenges in the Arrest Procedure

Arrest procedure in wildlife crime also differs from conventional policing. Forest officers are vested with the power to arrest without warrant under Sections 50(1)(c) and 50(3) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.²⁸ In practice, however, lapses occur in the documentation of the arrest memo, such as failure to record the proper time, place, and grounds of arrest, or omission in preparing the arrest memo altogether. Non-compliance with the proper arrest procedure by forest officers is another challenge, including non-compliance with safeguards such as informing the arrestee of the grounds of arrest and of their legal rights. These lapses can render an arrest legally vulnerable and open to challenge by the defence at trial.

Another significant concern relates to the socio-economic profile of the accused. Individuals apprehended in wildlife offences frequently come from marginalised or forest-dependent communities, many of whom are illiterate or unaware of legal procedures. This raises serious issues regarding informed consent, understanding of rights, and the voluntariness of statements. In the absence of proper explanation or legal assistance, there is a risk that procedural fairness is compromised.

An additional complexity arises from the social composition of the accused, as a significant number of those apprehended in such cases belong to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, No. 53, Acts of Parliament, 1972, §§ 50(1)(c), 50(3) (India).

This is particularly relevant in regions where the local population survives on forest produce or resources for subsistence.²⁹ This socio-legal context gives rise to multiple procedural and legal concerns. One recurring issue is the non-mention of the caste status of the accused in the prosecution report. While caste may not, in principle, be directly relevant to establishing the commission of an offence under wildlife protection law, its omission can lead to legal complications. In cases involving SC/ST individuals, certain procedural safeguards and protections become relevant, such as the safeguard against wrongful implication, coercion, or misuse of authority.³⁰ It is often observed by the researchers that field staff omit such details. Failure to document them properly raises questions regarding the transparency and completeness of an investigation.³¹

At the same time, there is sometimes an apprehension that improper handling, misrepresentation, or perceived targeting of individuals from these communities could lead to allegations of misuse of power by the forest department. This creates a situation in which officers either omit such details altogether or fail to address the associated procedural safeguards adequately. The issue therefore lies not merely in whether caste is mentioned, but in how the investigation ensures procedural fairness, non-discrimination, and compliance with constitutional safeguards. There is a need for clear guidelines on documentation practice.

G. Challenges Arising out of Outdated Prosecution Forms in Wildlife Crime

A significant yet often overlooked challenge in wildlife crime investigation is the continued use of outdated prosecution and documentation formats by the Odisha Forest Department in preparing prosecution reports. In many States the formats prescribed for the offence report, seizure list, arrest memo, remand application, intimation to the magistrate, and prosecution complaint have not been substantially revised for years, despite major developments in criminal procedure and judicial jurisprudence. As a result, the forms currently in use often fail to capture several procedural details that are now considered essential in a criminal investigation.

One of the primary issues is that these outdated formats do not adequately incorporate the safeguards and documentation requirements laid down in *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal*.³² For instance, the offence report does not mention the time at which the offence report was made; it mentions only the time at which the seizure or detection of the crime was carried out, which

²⁹ Anup Surendranath, *The Supreme Court's Judgment in Subhash Kashinath Mahajan: Diluting the SC/ST Act*, NAT'L L. SCH. INDIA REV. (2018).

³⁰ *Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra*, (2018) 6 S.C.C. 454.

³¹ The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, No. 33, Acts of Parliament, 1989 (India).

³² *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal*, (1997) 1 S.C.C. 416.

again creates conflict in the court of law. The before-search and after-search protocol is nowhere reflected in the forms. At present, there are no standardised forms specifically prescribed for forensic examination in wildlife crime cases, nor are there dedicated forms for documenting chain-of-custody records or the collection of evidence. This absence of structure creates significant gaps in evidentiary management and undermines the integrity of the investigation process.

These forms remain designed around older assumptions and do not reflect the evolving nature of wildlife crime investigation, which increasingly involves digital evidence, forensic examination and sampling, inter-State coordination, and organised criminal networks. The forms therefore fail to accommodate modern investigative realities.

III. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of wildlife offences, there is a pressing need for greater procedural clarity and institutional support within the wildlife law enforcement framework. A uniform system should be adopted across States for the registration of wildlife offence reports, with standardised formats and nomenclature to avoid confusion before the courts. Clear operational guidelines must also be issued to harmonise the procedural overlap between the Wild Life (Protection) Act and general criminal procedure laws.

Regular training and capacity-building programmes should be conducted for forest officers on investigation techniques, evidence handling, arrest procedures, and the preparation of prosecution documents. Specialised sensitisation programmes for judicial officers and prosecutors are equally necessary to improve understanding of the distinct nature of wildlife offences.

District-level forensic support systems should be developed to facilitate the timely examination of wildlife samples and the preservation of evidence. Basic forensic infrastructure, cold-storage facilities, and evidence-management protocols at the field level would significantly improve evidentiary integrity.

Better coordination mechanisms must be established among forest departments, the police, veterinary authorities, forensic laboratories, and wildlife crime control agencies to ensure seamless investigation and information sharing.

Finally, there is a need to adopt a rights-sensitive approach during investigation, particularly in cases involving vulnerable and marginalised communities, so that effective enforcement is balanced with procedural fairness and constitutional safeguards.

IV. CONCLUSION

Wildlife crime presents a distinct and complex challenge within the broader criminal justice system, owing to its unique procedural, ecological, and socio-legal dimensions. As this study has demonstrated, the process of enforcement, from detection to prosecution, is marked by structural and operational constraints. The absence of an immediate detection mechanism, the difficulties in conducting search and seizure in remote terrain, the inconsistencies in the preparation of offence reports, and the challenges in evidence collection and forensic examination collectively hinder the effectiveness of legal intervention.

The findings highlight that wildlife crime investigation deviates significantly from the conventional criminal process, particularly in its initiation through seizure and offence registration rather than the registration of a FIR. This procedural divergence often creates ambiguity in the judicial system. Similarly, issues relating to the chain of custody, the lack of decentralised forensic mechanisms and infrastructure, and the limited availability of experts such as veterinary officers further compromise the evidentiary strength of a case. Addressing these gaps through statutory clarity, institutional reform, capacity building, and a rights-sensitive approach is essential if the protective promise of wildlife law is to be realised in practice.
