

[Wild Things in India \(a photo essay\)](#)

Category : [May 1995](#)

Published by Anonymous on May. 02, 1995

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India has been renowned from time immemorial as a major sanctuary of wildlife. The legacy of exotic wild animals that we have inherited in our forests includes about 350 species of mammal, 1,200 species and 2,100 sub-species of birds and more than 20,000 species of insects. In its diversity of life forms, India is the second largest country of the world. India also lists many endangered species, much due to large-scale sport hunting similar to the rapid decimation of the buffalo in the US in the 1870s. This sport hunting-historically a pastime of the Kshatriya royalty-turned into wanton bloodsport as Indian rulers entertained the British Raj.

Earnest efforts are underway in India to conserve its wild treasures. As far back as 242 BCE the Buddhist emperor Ashoka issued state edicts protecting wildlife and certain trees. Earlier still, the Atharva Veda advises humankind to not harm that which walks, swims or flies, and cautioned against overtaxing nature's bounty. The brahminical government treatise, Artha Shastra (circa 300 BCE), advised the establishment of wild sanctuaries, protected city parks and the safekeeping of state-valued species such as elephants. Today, India still faces alarming slaughter of its precious wildlife by poachers, and an ho-hum attitude toward conservation by its teeming human wildlife.