



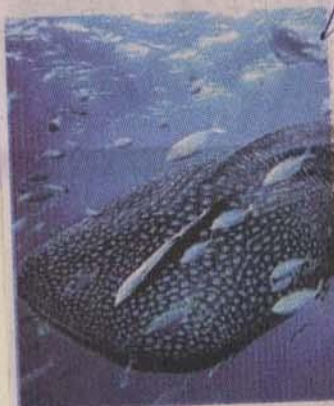
Protecting our flora and fauna

On the occasion of World Wildlife Week, **N Kalyani** looks at the protections available for the environment

Protection by legislation is nothing new, even for the environment and wildlife. The first activist head of state in modern times was probably Theodore Roosevelt of the United States. One of his most far-sighted measures was the conservation of wilderness areas, which was formalised by the Wilderness Acts of President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

In the Indian context, the first step was taken with the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which was enacted to serve as a uniform law across the country for protecting our rich floral and faunal biodiversity. By this time, such a law had become essential, with habitat loss, poaching, environmental pollution and degradation reaching dangerous levels in India.

With the passing years, even further protections have become necessary, given the exponential rise in threats to wildlife. When, for instance, it was discovered



that there was an alarming fall in the population of the Royal Bengal Tiger, the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006, provided for the creation of a National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The NTCA confers powers on state governments to notify tiger reserves, core tiger habitat areas that require protection.

Some of the other commonly known endangered species such as the elephant, lion, rhinoceros, gharial, whale shark, and the bustards are all animals that are listed in the six schedules of the Act. Scheduled animals are the endangered and critically endangered species that face extremely serious threats to survival and need the highest degree of protection.

The central government can alter the schedules by including an entry or deleting an entry from a schedule or transferring an entry from one to another of the schedules in the Act.

For example, when it was discovered that whale sharks were to be seen in the waters off the Gujarat coast and were being slaughtered, they were brought under the Act in 2001 under Schedule I. Similarly, the horseshoe crab, a unique crab of vital medical importance, found off the coast of Orissa, has now (since September last) been afforded protection under Schedule IV of the Act.

The Act also lists fines and penalties (including jail terms), for various offences including hunting, poaching or dealing in animal articles. The Act by the amendment in 2006, also provided for the constitution of a Wildlife Crime Control Bureau for the tiger and other endangered species.

The laws are in place, all that remains is enforcement, by far the harder task.