

Some of the programmes launched for conservation of biodiversity are as follows:-

Project Tiger: This was launched by the Government of India with the support of WWF-International in 1973 and was the first such initiative aimed at protecting the key species and all its habitats. Project tiger was initiated in nine tiger reserves in different ecosystems of the country, covering an area of 16,339 sq. km. By 2001, the number of tiger reserves increased to 27, covering an area of 37,761 sq. km. The tiger count climbed from 268 in 1972 to around 1500 in 1997 in 23 tiger reserves. However, Project Tiger's success was damaged by a new threat of poaching. Tiger numbers again began to decline, the reason being export to Chinese markets. In 2005, the Prime Minister of India took direct action to protect tigers by setting up a Tiger Task force. The Task Force presents an action agenda to manage tiger conservation in the Indian way, where forests are not only considered as wilderness but also as homes of people.

Crocodile Conservation:

Crocodiles have been threatened as their skin is used for making leather articles. This led to the near extinction of crocodiles in the wild in the 1960s in India. A crocodile breeding and conservation programme was initiated in 1975 to protect the remaining crocodiles in their natural habitat and by creating breeding centres. It is perhaps one of the most successful ex situ programmes launched in India. Crocodiles have been extensively bred in over 30 captive breeding centres, zoos and other sites where successful breeding takes place. Thousands of crocodiles of all three species have been bred and restocked in 20 natural water bodies.

Project elephant: This project was launched in 1992 to ensure long-term survival of a viable population of elephants in their natural habitats in North and North-eastern India and South India. In situ conservation is being implemented in 12 states. Despite this, elephant herds are shrinking and their migration routes are being disrupted by human activities.

Vulture breeding program: The last 20 years have seen a decline in the vulture population across India. Three of the nine species are listed as critically endangered by the IUCN. Visceral Gout, a disease in birds, caused by diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug, is known to be the main cause of the reductions in populations. Diclofenac is given to sick cattle to reduce their pain so that they can work for long on farmlands. Once the cattle die, they are left out in the open to be fed to vultures. However, vultures feeding on the flesh are poisoned by diclofenac and hence they die, which contributes to falling numbers in vulture population. The Government of India has banned diclofenac and now Meloxicam is recommended as an alternative to it. In 2001, a Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre was established in Pinjore in Haryana by the Bombay Natural History Society (BHNS) and the Haryana Forest Department. The centre houses white-backed vultures (15 adults and 9 juveniles), long-billed vultures (3 adults and 25 juveniles), slender-billed vultures and the Himalayan griffon. One hundred pairs are set to be released by 2020.

Beej Bachao Andolan- A movement to save the seeds

This movement began in the foothills of the Himalayas. The members collected seeds of diverse crops in Garhwal. The movement has successfully conserved hundreds of local rice varieties,

rajma (kidney beans), pulses, millets, vegetables, spices and herbs. Many different varieties are being grown as an outcome of this programme in local farmer's fields. This has also been supported by local women's groups who felt those varieties were better than those provided by the green revolution. In contrast, men who were interested in cash returns in a short time found it difficult to appreciate the benefits of growing indigenous varieties.

CASE STUDY 1

Kokkare Bellur Karnataka: Coexistence (humans and wildlife)

The pelican, which is an endangered species, breeds in large numbers at Kokkare Bellur, which is one of the ten known breeding sites in India. Kokkare Bellur is a village in southern India.

In December every year, hundreds of spot-billed pelicans, painted storks, ibis and other birds migrate to this area to establish breeding colonies on the tall tamarind trees in the centre of the village. The local people have protected the birds, believing that they bring good luck with relation to rain and crops. The villagers collect a rich supply of the natural fertiliser that collects below the nests, that guano. The droppings of these fish-eating birds are rich in nitrate.

CASE STUDY 2

WONDER SHEEP

Generally speaking, Indian sheep production is constrained due to challenges of low prolificacy (fertility) and parasitic worms. In order to make the sheep industry more profitable in Maharashtra, Bon Nimbkar, the founder of the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute in Phaltan, in Maharashtra was looking to develop prolific, worm resistant, worm-resistant meat sheep that could adapt to the local conditions of the state. It was known that the Booroola merino sheep in Australia was researched. It was then realised that the large-bodied Australian sheep in actual fact came from Sunderbans in West Bengal.