

INDIAN WILDLIFE

CAN THE TIGER SAVE ITS STRIPES?



OLD TIGER HUNTING SCENE

"Going in quest thereof, one of our Soldiers, a Youth, killed a Tigre-Royal; it was brought home by 30 or 40 Combies (Koonbee), the Body tied to a long Bamboo, the Tail extended... it was a Tigre of the Biggest and Noblest Kind, Five Feet in Length beside the Tail, Three and a Half in Height, it was of a light Yellow, streaked with Black, like a Tabby Cat... the Visage Fierce and Majestick, the Teeth gnashing..." Fryer (1675)

Three hundred and two years ago, this officer of the East India Company must have found the tiger a wondrous creature out of his world. Swathed in verdant jungle, crisscrossed by rivers, abounding in birds and animals of every shape and size and hue, India must have been, for Fryer, a country as exciting and varied as Darwin's Galapagos.

Today, thirty years after the British left Indian shores, the com-

bies that Fryer saw have multiplied into an ocean of humanity. Jungles have given way to civilization, the rivers have lost their blue, unpolluted lustre, and the animals, saddest of all, have dwindled in their numbers, stalked by eager hunters, sought after by the fashionable women of the world, thrust to the brink of oblivion by the guns of plundering men.

Were today's Indian child asked to describe a tiger, it would recite the characteristics of the sad-eyed animal it had seen pacing in a cage at the nearby zoo. In the forests of the modern Indian night, shrunk as they have, the tiger burns dim, extremely dim. So do a host of other animals and birds, many of them peculiar to India. They inhabit the last pockets of Indian wildlife. But for the dedicated efforts of the nation's conservationists, they might soon join the ranks of the Podo.

Already, the magnificent Indian cheetah, and the pink-headed duck have been declared extinct. The Great Indian Bustard is presently considered the most endangered Indian bird. Many other species have been included in the dreaded Red Data book of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

The word 'wildlife' brings many associations with it—the hunters of the British Raj who used to venture forth, trailed by armies of bearers and beaters, on the *shikar*; men like Colonel Jim Corbett, who was responsible for killing many a man-eating tiger in the Kumaon region in North India; and authors like Rudyard Kipling, who wrote with warmth and understanding of the world of wild animals, of Mowgli and his jungle friends.

Wildlife has few other connotations in present-day India. Most people think wildlife has to do with a few 'wild' animals that roam the nation's 'forests'. Few are aware of the fact that the forests are diminishing rapidly in area and extent, and that the animals, hounded by civilization, are dying off or are being killed off in huge numbers. The times have changed, and with them, the hunters' methods, too. Gone are the loud beaters and the flint-lock rifles. Today's poachers are armed with telescopic-sight rifles, and drive around in speedy jeeps. Occasionally, harried conservationists carry out surveys, and publish woebegone figures. In 1900, for instance, there were around 40,000 tigers. Today, there are hardly 2,000 left. And so the lists grow, and the animals and birds dwindle.

There is no doubt that the authorities, the government, have been generally apathetic to the plight of the nation's wildlife. There has been very little effort put into educating the average citizen about the need for conservation, for an increased ecological awareness. In a paper presented at the IUCN General Assembly in Zaire in 1975, Dr Raymond F. Dasmann summarized this apathy:

"Most of us, I fear, have grown up with the idea that conservation was the responsibility of governments, and that the duty of conservationists was to persuade governments to do the right thing. The



PETER JACKSON COURTESY WWF-INDIA

THIS WOLF LOOKS A FAR CRY FROM HIS COUSINS IN NORTH AMERICA

idea that the first duty of a conservationist was to practice a conservation lifestyle only really became obvious when the ecological truth became known that the population crisis, the energy crisis, and all other crises were interlinked and related to how each of us lived from day to day..."

The extent of deforestation in India today is appalling, to put it mildly. Forests recycle the air man breathes, provide the timber he uses, the weather he depends on. But, oblivious of these things, man has gone about felling trees with reckless disregard for the conse-

INDIA'S MAGNIFICENT NATIONAL ANIMAL, THE TIGER HAS TODAY DECLINED IN NUMBERS TO LESS THAN 2,000

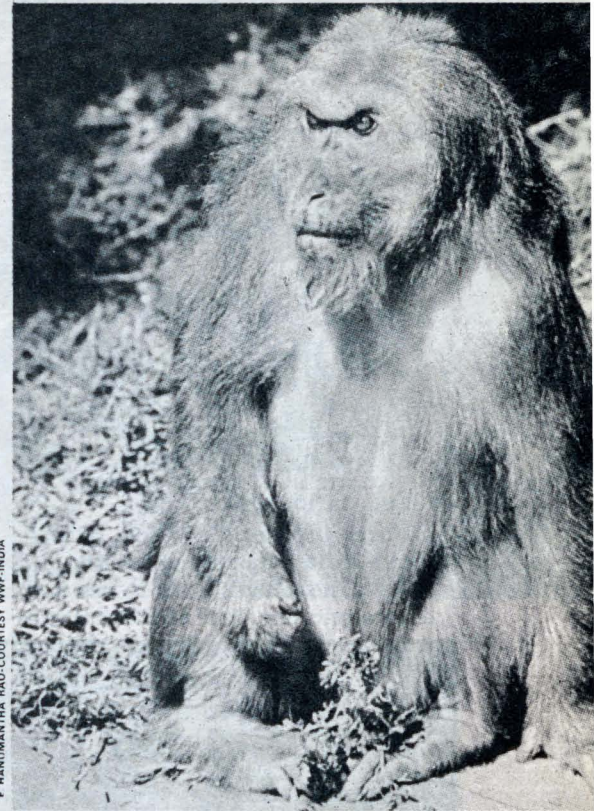


E. HANUMANTHA RAO COURTESY WWF-INDIA

quences. A National Forest Policy was set out in 1952, and stipulates that a minimum of 33% of the total geographical area of the country ought to be under green cover. And the Famine Commission of India pointed out, as far back as in 1880, that lack of forest cover and famine are closely linked. In spite of all this, only 19% of the land in India today is under forest.

In its anxiety to promote projects that will benefit the common man, the government has very often ignored the ecological damage that might ensue. After all, it is argued, people need jobs, more land needs to be brought under the plough. So what if a few forests are cut down? Is wildlife more important than people? And the cost of deforestation is overlooked—in Maharashtra, for instance, in 1971-72, Rs. 1,000 million was spent on drought relief, while a paltry Rs. 4 million was spent in 1973 on reforestation.

Jawaharlal Nehru was characterized by a deep understanding for nature, and conservation. In his foreword to E.P. Gee's book, *The Wildlife of India*, he wrote: "Wild life? That is how we refer to the magnificent animals of our jungles and to the beautiful birds that brighten our lives. I wonder sometimes what these animals and birds think of man and how they would describe him if they had the capacity to do so. I rather doubt if their description would be very complimentary to man. In spite of



F. HANUMANTHA RAO COURTESY WWF-INDIA

STUMP-TAILED MACAQUE, ONE OF THE ENDANGERED MONKEY SPECIES

our culture and civilization, in many ways man continues to be not only wild but more dangerous than any of the so-called wild animals."

Recently, the conservation authorities in a certain State decided to issue more hunting licenses for certain species. The argument was that hunting is essential, because "it eliminates weaker animals so that the survivors are able to produce healthier offspring"! And only a couple of years back was a Joint Secretary for Forestry and Wildlife appointed by the Ministry for Agriculture and Irrigation in Delhi, to supervise the nation's conservation projects.

There is hope yet, say the more dedicated of India's conservationists. Many State governments have taken up reforestation with genuine interest. More and more people are realizing the fact that man is but one strand in the intricate web of ecological interdependence. And it is in this vital field of education and action that the World Wildlife Fund-India has proved to be a blessing.

Founded in 1962, the World Wildlife Fund today has roughly 27 national appeals



THE ASIATIC LION-EXTINCT EXCEPT IN THE GIR NATIONAL PARK

all over the world. World Wildlife Fund-India started operating in 1970. The Fund's role is basically a catalytic one, and it concentrates

on pointing out the ecological needs of a situation that requires to be remedied, and induces other organizations, Governmental or otherwise, to act. To date, the most impressive project initiated by the World Wildlife Fund-India has been Project Tiger.

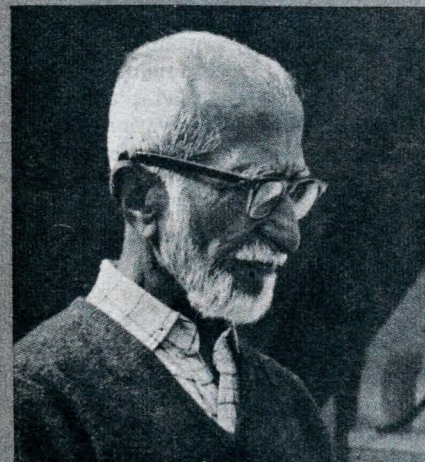
Project Tiger was launched principally through the personal interest evinced by the former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi. The WWF raised \$1 million on its part through an international fund-raising and publicity campaign for the Indian tiger. Nine major tiger reserves have been officially established, and equipment in the form of anti-poaching implements like vehicles, rifles, motor-boats, binoculars, camping gear, etc., have been donated by the WWF. Now just over three years old, Project Tiger has proved to be a spectacular success, with the tiger population registering a good increase.

The World Wildlife Fund-India was also responsible for focusing attention on the diminishing numbers of other species, like the Asiatic lion, the Swamp Deer, the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros, the Nilgiri Tahr, and the Great Indian Bustard. In many cases, governmental action has been initiated due to this campaigning. Through its offices, the WWF-India has also been responsible for launching seminars and conferences, from time to time, on conservation and allied subjects; for the Nature Clubs of India, through which children are taught the need for conservation; and the enactment of legislation on conservation. The Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 has now been adopted by almost all the Indian States.

Today, there are ten major wildlife sanctuaries in India—Kaziranga National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary

DR SALIM ALI

'There Is No Hope For India's Wildlife'



DR. SALIM ALI

Dr Salim Abdul Ali, at age 80, is one of India's most respected and well-known conservationists, and an internationally renowned ornithologist. The number of awards and recognitions Dr Ali has won make a very impressive list. In 1976, he was awarded the \$50,000 J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize for 1975, awarded by the World Wildlife Fund. Dr Ali is also a Member of Honor of the WWF, and the only Indian to be awarded the Order of the Golden Ark by Prince Bernhard, President of WWF-International. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1958 and the

Padma Vibhushan in 1976. The Getty Prize crowned a lifetime of devoted work on India's rich bird-life, culminating in the monumental ten-volume "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan," which Dr Ali co-authored with Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington. Primarily interested in bird ecology, Dr Ali also led research into migration, which has demonstrated the importance of the Indian sub-continent in world bird movements. Dr Ali is also the President of the Bombay Natural History Society (founded in 1883)—an institution that has done pioneering work in regard to the flora and fauna of the Oriental Region. Through the BNHS's and Dr Ali's efforts, a Department of Field Ornithology has been set up in Bombay University, offering facilities for Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral studies. In this interview, Dr Ali discusses his favorite subject: wildlife.

Q.: Dr. Ali, you have been for long one of India's foremost conservationists. What do you think is the present situation as regards conservation of the nation's wildlife?

S.A.: I think the population is sliding out of control, and with it, everything else. There is no hope at all of saving wildlife unless we can stem this population growth. Forests are being cut down to resettle people, to rehabilitate refugees and repatriates from other countries, and the people are breeding like rabbits. I think one of the issues we will soon have to tackle, once we have sufficient electrical power, is that of the forests that are being

chopped down. For instance, cremation. Every body that is cremated requires around 100 kilograms of firewood. We have hundreds of millions of people to cremate. How long are the forests going to last? Electric crematoriums are much more practical.

Q.: Do you think enough people have been made conscious of the need for conservation?

S.A.: The consciousness should be developed at the bottom. I think the people at the top, the educated people, are already well-indoctrinated in the need for conservation. After all, it is the people in the villages who do the actual damage. With our rate of illiteracy, it is obvious we cannot educate people through books. I think television, although it is not so widespread right now, is the best medium we can use for educating the rural folk. Such programs should not contain only advice, but should create interest in the minds of the people, so that it develops by itself, so that the villagers perceive some method in this 'madness'. When a villager is told to save the deer, he says "The deer eat up my crops, and you ask me to save it!"

Q.: Even among the educated people, don't you think many people associate themselves with conservation merely for the sake of treating it as some sort of a status symbol?

S.A.: That is so in many things in life. But there are many well-

in Assam, Gir National Park in Gujarat, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala, Bandipur National Park in Karnataka, Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, Ghana Bird Sanctuary at Bharatpur, Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu, Corbett National Park in Uttar Pradesh, and the Dudwa National Park at Lakhimpur Kheri. Among these, the Kaziranga National Park is well-known for its rhino population; the Gir National Park for its lions, Periyar for its elephants; Kanha for its deer; Ghana for its birds; and Corbett and Dudwa for tigers.

Much remains to be done, however. Poaching has not been totally stamped out, and there are frequent reports of poachers' dens being raided, and of piles of precious animal skins being seized. India ratified the International Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora in



THE GREAT INDIAN ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS, HUNTED FOR ITS HORN, WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO POSSESS MAGICAL AND APHRODISIACAL PROPERTIES

meaning people too, who could, with a little support from the government, achieve a lot. And in this context, I feel, for conservationists, the fact that Mrs Indira Gandhi has gone out of the picture is a great loss. She was personally interested in conservation, and she saw to it that a lot was done—not as a matter of duty, but because she felt something ought to be done fast. I hope the new government will be equally sympathetic, because one must realize that this cause is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Q.: What, in your opinion, are the major menaces that obstruct conservation in India today?

S.A.: First of all there is the deforestation that is going on. This deprives the animals of their natural habitat, they come into conflict with the human beings in that area, and are naturally killed. Secondly, there is the menace of pesticides and other chemicals. We can protect the tiger from being shot. But it is impossible to protect it from being poisoned by a villager who is angry that his cow has been killed. Any ignorant peasant can go and buy whatever poisons he wants to for the purpose of 'protecting' his crops!

Q.: As an ornithologist, which Indian bird would you say is the most endangered today?

S.A.: The Great Indian Bustard, of course! It's a big bird, with plenty of tasty meat. And it's a stupid bird. With a jeep, you can drive right up

to it and shoot it at point-blank range! Also, its habitat, which used to be grassland, has been steadily eroded because thousands of head of useless cattle are let loose to graze amidst the grass. These cattle eat up grass that might prove useful for good cattle, too. And they are preserved because they are supposed to be sacred!

Q.: What about all these 'bird export' rackets?

S.A.: Unfortunately, although we talk so much about *ahimsa* (non-violence), we have no feeling for life whatsoever. When a hundred birds can be crammed into a little box because the exporter saves on freight, I think the limit has been crossed! When it comes to making money, nothing will stop the Indian! Altogether, I feel very depressed.

Q.: Wouldn't tourism affect wildlife adversely?

S.A.: Yes, and I think it is a very important point. Bharatpur has the Ghana Bird Sanctuary, for instance, and it is considered to be one of the best in the world. This fact, however, has attracted thousands of tourists from all over the world to Bharatpur. These tourists dirty the area, make a lot of noise, and generally disturb the birds. So I am afraid tourism is not an unmixed blessing.

Q.: Again because of the growth of population, aren't limitations placed on the area of sanctuaries? If certain species were very well

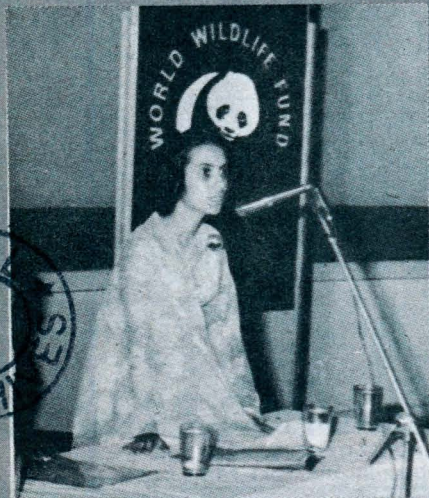
protected, wouldn't they eventually overflow the sanctuaries?

S.A.: Of course the area is limited, and sometimes in exceptional cases like Kaziranga, where the rhinos have overflowed the sanctuary's capacity, we have problems. But we can remedy this by having auxiliary sanctuaries. Every bit of forest that has not been encroached upon should be promptly declared a sanctuary, and protected. Otherwise, gradually, if people see such tracts are not earmarked for a specific purpose, they soon move in. There is also the question of the National Parks and the Game Sanctuaries. National Parks are administered by the Central Government, while Game Sanctuaries are run by the State Governments. As many Sanctuaries as possible ought to be converted into National Parks. Because State controls are often unpredictable. Some State Minister might decide to put up a tourist bungalow in a sanctuary, another might decide to carve out a thousand acres in order to resettle some villagers.

Q.: What is your opinion of the present anti-poaching laws?

S.A.: I think the measures are not strict enough. The punishment should be so severe that it ought to be a deterrent. It is no use fining a professional poacher, with a fleet of jeeps and a brace of sophisticated weapons, a few hundred rupees.

'Our Work Is Of A Catalytic Nature'



MRS. D. S. VARIAVA

Mrs Dilnavaz S. Variava is the Administrator of the World Wildlife Fund-India. In this interview, she describes the manner in which WWF-India operates, the projects it has initiated, and the role it plays in educating the public of the need for conservation.

Q.: Mrs Variava, how does World Wildlife Fund-India operate?

D.S.V.: The WWF-India's headquarters are here in Bombay. We have a nucleus of full-time staff, and we have volunteer groups throughout the country. The volunteer groups are organized into four regions. Altogether 17 or 18 locations in India are covered. WWF-India does not get any Governmental grants; all our funds are raised through donations, and through the sale of items like greeting cards and calendars, and a variety of fund-raising schemes. WWF International only finances projects, and not the working of the

Indian appeal. We are quite autonomous, except in the case of some policies on conservation issues, which have international significance, like Project Tiger, for instance.

Q.: How far is the WWF-India involved in the implementation of conservation projects?

D.S.V.: We have several types of projects. Very often we finance a study or a survey of an area or a certain species in need of protection, and thereafter present the report to the governmental authorities. This kind of study is always done by the person or the institution that we consider is most effective in doing so. Then we have, occasionally, government projects where we do get involved in terms of providing some of the initial financial assistance, primarily of a catalytic nature. Apart from Project Tiger, we have also offered financial help in a couple of other projects.

Q.: After a project is launched by the government, doesn't the WWF-India have any control over the way it is being run?

D.S.V.: We may have a follow-up project, we may be constantly providing feedback. If something is going wrong, we may point it out. There are a couple of projects where we may get directly involved. We have a pheasant breeding project in Kalimpong, and a crocodile breeding project in Madras, which is jointly run with the Madras Snake Park. These projects are entirely operated by WWF-India. Even for the Madras Snake Park, the entire initial financing was provided by WWF-India.

Q.: How well do you think conservation projects in India are being run?

D.S.V.: There is no doubt that wildlife conservation in India faces tremendous difficulties. There is the problem of population. Also, a lot of people are not aware of how man's well-being is closely linked

with the conservation of forests, and with the maintenance of an ecological balance. Even if there is awareness, the ability to do something may be lacking. There are a few forest officials who are very much interested in conservation, and one official who is involved actively is worth many more people outside officialdom. But there are many disinterested officials, too. Mainly because forestry training has historically emphasized the exploitation of forests.

Q.: How does WWF-India go about educating the public about the need for conservation?

D.S.V.: There are three groups we aim at: the general public, which includes the decision-makers; the mass media, which has proved very useful and helpful in giving coverage to WWF-India activities; and thirdly, the children, who we think are quite aware of nature, and there is an instinctive affinity for nature among children. This tends to die out as the children grow older. So we launched what could be a significant movement—the Nature Clubs of India—last July. Any fifteen or more children who want to form a club can get affiliation to the WWF-India. They have to pay a very nominal amount per child per year, and they get a variety of literature, projects that they can do themselves, and we are trying to build up an entire library of audio-visual slide shows which we can organize for the children. From this year we will also be organizing camps for children on a regular basis, in any suitable natural environment. Through this Nature Club movement, if we can produce even ten Salim Alis from the entire lot, it would have been truly worthwhile. Ultimately, awareness about conservation is a slowly growing process. It takes time, and I think the World Wildlife Fund-India has helped, in its own way, to hasten this process of education to some extent.

1976, and has banned the export of skins and pelts of many endangered animals. Among the species that are on the officially endangered list are: the lion-tailed macaque, the elephant, gibbons, the clouded leopard, the snow leopard, the great Indian rhinoceros, musk deer, swamp deer, marsh crocodiles, and the gharials.

There is also the problem of maintaining the boundaries of the

sanctuaries. Although wildlife has proved to be a considerable tourist attraction, the numbers of people visiting wildlife spots has increased so much that in certain areas, the wildlife itself is disturbed by the intrusions. Pressures from overpopulation in neighboring villages are also present, and conservationists live in constant dread of having a sanctuary shrink due to the zeal of some settlement-minded

government official. It is for this reason that some conservationists have suggested that each sanctuary ought to have an 'inner sanctum', or *abhayaranya*, a core area in which human intrusions can be restricted to the barest minimum.

In Kaziranga and in Corbett respectively, the population of rhinos and tigers has gone up encouragingly, so much so that some conservationists fear that the popu-

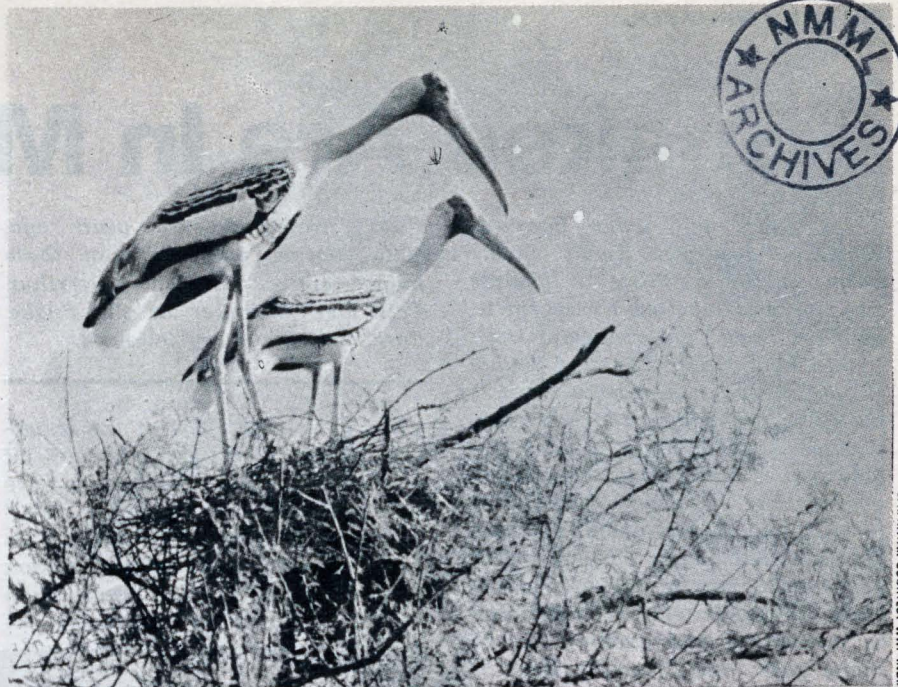
lations might soon outgrow the sanctuaries. In January 1975, for instance, the population of elephants went up in the forests of Landsdowne and Kalagarh, a part of which forms the Corbett National Park. The elephants started straying out of these forests, and rampaging in sugarcane and wheat fields of the nearby Bijnor district. Such inadvertent effects of conservation sometimes provoke the anti-conservationists into questioning the social need for sanctuaries. But when one comes across the fact that Project Tiger covers only 30% of the tigers in India, and that 70% are *outside* the highly protected Tiger Reserves, one realizes the need for intensifying such projects.

Human ingenuity can either wreck official projects, or help them along tremendously. In April this year, for instance, a consignment of skins



THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD, ALSO ON THE ENDANGERED LIST

was seized from Delhi airport. The concerned dealer was exporting them as jackal skins. A closer look revealed that the skins were not of jackals, but of wolves. Wolves are officially listed as endangered in India, and so are Red Pandas, which are sought to be exported as brown bear cubs by imaginative dealers. On the other hand, there is the heartening story of villagers in the Himalayan foothills in Uttar



PAINTED STORKS PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE FAMOUS BHARATPUR BIRD SANCTUARY IN RAJASTHAN

Pradesh, who resorted to a *Chipko Andolan* ('embrace the trees' movement), in order to prevent contractors from cutting down ash trees that had been allotted by the State Government. As a result of this, the government later banned the indiscriminate felling of trees.

And so the long process of public education continues, and a few battles are won along the way. The overall picture is without doubt gloomy. And one major reason for this is man himself. Whether the tiger can save its stripes, the rhino its horn, and the lion its mane, will depend on whether man essentially realizes the need to preserve the wildlife and the vegetation that balance his own existence. A

WWF-India booklet sums up this feeling:

"Whether in the thousands of species already extinct or on the brink of extinction, or in the vast stretches of arid deserts of his own creation, the open reaches of polluted seas, or the smog-laden atmosphere, the hand of man is ominously evident. If more life-supporting systems—and ultimately man himself—are not to follow, man must treat the natural environment as his investment in survival, and tend it as carefully as he would a farm, an orchard or a flock of sheep; living off the fruit, not the seed; the interest, not the capital."

CHAITANYA KALBAG

"HERE'S TO THE WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT OF 1972!"

