

Current Trends of Wildlife Research (with an overview of research in the past and lessons for future)

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The current trends of wildlife research have been overviewed in the backdrop of the author's (LAKS) 40 years long work in wetland and upland primarily linked to research, education and conservation of crocodiles, tiger and elephant in India. Information have been drawn from reports published at the country level by Government of India, research reports of the Wildlife Institute of India as a national autonomous body, research at the state level by Government of Odisha, and research information given on the web by three renowned NGOs namely, the World Wildlife Fund-India (WWF), Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). Published information from the USA have also been consulted.

Wildlife research has gone a long way beyond tracking of signs and evidences or recording phenomena linked to behaviour and natural history, in the 1970s. The current trends of research are in the fields of satellite radio-tracking, remote sensing and GIS applications, molecular studies for wildlife forensics, developing techniques to manage adverse man-wildlife interface, emphasizing socio-economic studies for reducing burden on stake-holding human populations living within and at the edge of wildlife sanctuaries, and studding the reports with overdose of statistics that go beyond the understanding of an average wildlife student, the grass-root level wildlife managers, the general public and media.

The current trend requires that the wildlife researcher has to be a mixture of the biologist, ecologist, sociologist, geologist, architect, computer-educated, and statistician with knowledge about the legal aspects. Above all, he has to be a human who understands and considers what he is studying about and for whom he conducts the studies. Scientific research is required to present the truth and bring balance in objectives of different departments.

The events leading to organized research for wildlife management in USA started in 1862, about 60 years before Leopold published 'Game Management' in 1933. History in the USA indicates experiences of strong disconnect between research and managers. We also come across parallel situations at times in India. Historically wildlife research in the USA was influenced by the private range owners and industrial houses, but in India research is often opportunistic data collection and analysis as by-product of wildlife management for 'total conservation'. The scientists have to adopt methods where wildlife is protected, there is no invasive action, the people dominated landscape do not feel inconvenience, the use of equipment and gadgets do not seize employment opportunities or do not overshadow the traditional knowledge and skill.

Research by scientists from universities or by NGOs or the PA-managers themselves are more prone to experience limitations like lack of research-continuity because of non-research responsibilities or research responsibility of a different type in a different location. The

wildlife researcher forming the backbone in wildlife management should ensure continuity with dedication over long periods of time. The work and contributions by the three in-house wildlife scientists Dr L. A. K. Singh, Dr S. K. Kar and Dr C. S. Kar, all of whom have now retired from Government of Odisha, after rendering services of over 36 years were focal points to the success of flagship conservation programmes, and all research activities in the field and at wildlife headquarters.

Wildlife science is for field implementation. Therefore, the language of a research report should be simple and understandable by grass root workers. As far as possible the wildlife scientist should publish the invented management techniques and the research results in such journals which are easily available to managers and field practitioners. On the contrary, like most recent-day scientists the wildlife scientists from large institutions face career competition and select journals with high 'Impact Factor'. This situation tends to take the fruits of research away from field implementation. As an alternative, the wildlife scientists may have a version of their findings for the international scientific community if it is relevant for them, and also a simplified version for the local staffs who put the knowledge into practice.

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