



# The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 562, New Paltz, NY 12561

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## IGUANAS FELL FROM THE TREES!

By Chris Arenella



Photo ©Chris Arenella

Florida, because of its subtropical climate, is a paradise for wildlife watching. It's home to a myriad of native and non-native species of mammals, reptiles, and birds.

**Many of the non-native, or so called "invasive" species were brought in by the exotic pet trade.** These include the green iguana and the Burmese python. Iguanas are native to Central and South America, while Burmese pythons originate from Southeast Asia.

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## Front Lens

# PROPERTY OR PERSONS?

By Lauren Wesp

Outside the bounds of captivity, wildlife can appear as symbols of freedom. They seem so unrestrained, roaming about uncaged and unchained. In a modern world that can feel so domesticated, this comparatively wild life experienced by wildlife can even feel envious. But are wildlife really as free as they appear? According to United States law, the answer is 'nope.'

**It might sound surprising, but every nonhuman animal in the United States is legally considered property – a thing that can be owned. While captive nonhuman animals are considered private property, non-captive wildlife are essentially the property of the state. In other words, the state owns all nonhuman animals who aren't privately owned. So whether it's the squirrel who hangs out on your street, the family of geese inhabiting a suburban park, or a pack of wolves roaming a remote forest, all of them are a form of state property.**

In contrast to being property, most humans fall under the legal category of persons. In fact, in colloquial speech, the words "human" and "person" are used interchangeably. **From a legal standpoint, however, personhood has a specific meaning as a category encompassing those entitled to rights.**



**A buffalo and a statue of a buffalo are clearly not the same, but legally, they are both merely property.**

Photo ©Lauren Wesp

Historically, the horrors of American slavery were able to take place because African slaves were legally labeled as property rather than persons. In modern times, humans are not granted personhood status until birth as *Roe v. Wade* decided that "a human fetus is not a legal person." While US law hasn't always granted personhood to all humans, there are actually cases in which nonhumans have been considered to be legal persons, such as ships, or more controversially, corporations (*Citizens United v. FEC*). **So, the boundary between legal persons and property is fluid and may shift along with our changing constructions of who or even what constitutes a person.**

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# MAKING THE CASE FOR TIGER CONSERVATION

By Bindu Gopal Rao



Photo ©Vishnu Vijayan, Conservation Biologist PaTCoF

Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, spread over 248.5 sq mi in Kerala in South India, is making a case for conserving India's national animal, the tiger.

**The Parambikulam Tiger Conservation Foundation (PaTCoF)**, located in the Western Ghats, is one of the premier Tiger Reserves of India, endowed with a unique species, habitat, and ecosystem diversity, and is characterized by functional human-ecological affinities.

With a long-term vision to facilitate and support the conservation of tiger and biodiversity, through multi-stakeholder participation, their work has had a positive impact across the zone. The tiger reserve was recently awarded by NatWest Group India (Earth Hero Awards) on various initiatives to conserve the ecological biodiversity as well.

The PaTCoF has taken the lead in carrying out All Kerala Tiger Monitoring using camera traps in the entire forest areas of the Kerala State. This was a revolutionary step which is presently in the process of replication by other states of India. **Vysak Sasikumar, Indian Forest Service, Deputy Director, Parambikulam Tiger Reserve says, "our activities are quite diverse and are aimed at conservation. This kind of activity has ensured that there has been no poaching in the reserve since 2006."**

As per protocol established by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, phase four Tiger monitoring is mandatory every year and the team deploys camera traps that help in understanding the population dynamics. The camera trap is basically the cornerstone of the present-day paradigm of population monitoring. "As per our annual monitoring in 2021, we have found 35 tigers and co-predators are also captured. This gives us a basic understanding of what is the area of operation of each tiger and the camera trap images of where a particular tiger has been captured establishes its territory. Additionally, if there is any conflict related to tigers in the adjoining areas close to the human population, we can check with our database and find out which tiger is the one involved in the conflict. And then we can take a scientific decision on how to mitigate this conflict," says Sasikumar. The camera traps also allow for a tiger database and ID for each tiger. They also help in tracking any illegal entry or trespassing and in 2021, sandalwood tree smuggling the reserve could identify culprits with evidence.

Parambikulam is also involved in the All-India Tiger estimation that happens every four years. "Apart from deploying our camera traps, we also do distance sampling in which the forest staff will walk throughout the forest and collect certain information from the field which will

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Photo ©Jim Robertson

Since wildlife are legally property rather than persons, they do not have rights. This might sound counterintuitive since there are many protections for wildlife. For example, the Endangered Species Act protects some animals from certain actions that may put their continuation as a species at risk. These protections, however, are privileges that may or may not be given to nonhuman animals. In contrast, rights are something to which one is entitled. **Without rights, wildlife is at the mercy of the whims of human decisions, while the government reserves the right to choose when it's permissible to "take" wildlife by capturing or killing them.**

**To have rights, wildlife would have to move from the category of property to persons. The Nonhuman Rights Project has been advocating for this goal by filing Habeas Corpus lawsuits, claiming that their chimpanzee and elephant clients are legal persons whose 5th amendment right to not be imprisoned without just cause has been violated. While US courts have yet to accept this argument, an orangutan named Sandra was granted the right to freedom from captivity based on a case in Argentina modeled after the Nonhuman Rights Project's lawsuits. More recently, the Nonhuman Rights Project has expanded its arsenal of tactics by advocating for legislative changes as well.**

When the U.S. was in its infancy, our laws were written based on limited scientific understanding of non-human animals with the faulty belief that they lacked

consciousness. In the 21st century, however, wide swaths of research have shown otherwise. **In line with the findings of the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, over 30 countries now recognize non-human animals as conscious beings. Just like us, they experience an array of physical and emotional states, ranging from suffering to euphoria. Their lives matter to them just as our own lives matter to us; thus, they share our interest in being protected by rights.**

In classifying other species of animals as "things," we are engaged in the process of devaluation. By devaluing others, we create a hierarchy based on the claim that some lives are less worthy of moral consideration. Consequently, this devaluation provides an excuse to mistreat those deemed as less than. "The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that's wrong with the world." -Paul Farmer

**Wildlife (and other animals) deserve the right to freedom – a cherished American value. Therefore, it is time to reclassify nonhuman animals as persons. This would be simply bringing the law up to date with what we already know -animals are not merely things but are so much more.**

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**Lauren Wesp** is an animal rights advocate. She has an M.A. in Sociology and lives with two sweet kitties, Nunu and Kirara. Inspired by curiosity, she enjoys sharing in the exploration of interesting ideas and is especially motivated by what speaks to her heart.

# “PROTECTED AREAS” DON’T ALWAYS PROTECT— WILDLIFE POPULATIONS STILL PLUMMET

By Patrick Kuklinski

It’s no secret that, around the world, wildlife populations are plummeting. Much of this is inevitable due to human habitat destruction, development, release of invasive species, and other impacts from our poor behavior. **Bird populations have dropped by the millions, and mammals aren’t much better off, either. And, as it turns out, many of our attempts to fix our mistakes aren’t working, either. A new study, published in 2022, reveals that many protected areas set aside to aid wildlife aren’t quite fulfilling their purpose. This study, published in *Nature*, found that protected areas didn’t always suffice as suitable habitat for the waterbirds surveyed in the study.** The researchers concluded that even though some areas may be set aside as ‘protected’, threats to waterbirds (and by association other primarily aquatic-dwelling animals) aren’t always deterred - just setting an area aside doesn’t stop rising sea levels, pollution, or installation of upstream dams. Additionally, **areas set aside for conservation showed a greater benefit to the species they were intended to protect when there was a management program in place.** When dealing with threatened species, these impacts are especially important.



I interviewed **Dr. Hannah Wauchope**, a researcher on this project, for some more insight into this often-overlooked issue. Despite scientists’ best efforts, protecting suitable habitat and the species that live there becomes difficult when the public is unaware of the true need. “I think that the public (and even myself at times!) think that once an area is designated as ‘protected’, that our job is done, and it will now preserve nature. **What our research shows is that the mere designation of a protected area is not enough – parks need resources and support to reduce the impact of humans within their borders,**” said Wauchope. **“Many protected areas must juggle the competing objectives of being spaces for nature whilst also being spaces for human recreation. People can take care when visiting protect-**

**ed areas to stay on paths, stay out of any areas closed off for habitat protection and regeneration, and respect other signage, such as keeping dogs on leads or cleaning boots in areas where there are invasive species. Beyond this, the most important thing is to support legislation and politicians that are taking an active interest in habitat protection and restoration.”** Sometimes, habitat disturbance is a part of everyday life that we may overlook or ignore. After all, how much damage can one dog do? But in reality, to an already fragile ecosystem, even issues we may find dismissible can be fatal to threatened species.

I asked Dr. Wauchope what the difference was between managed and unmanaged habitats. After all, at first glance, it seems like any habitat set aside for conservation should be beneficial. “This entirely depends on the site, but for the areas that we studied, the difference is that managed habitats are receiving resources and funding to be able to adequately ensure that the area is being supported, and harmful impacts to the area are being minimized,” said Wauchope. “In addition, they are areas where support of wildlife and habitat is a key goal of the protected area, as opposed to areas where a key goal may be human recreation. We found that managed areas were more likely to have a positive impact on waterbird populations.” **Unfortunately, it seems that the solution to saving threatened species isn’t as simple as marking aside some land. “There are all sorts of things that can be done to manage a habitat suitably; these can include patrols to ensure that hunting or poaching do not take place, restoration of previously degraded land, removal of invasive species, or removal of sources of pollution. Management can also be more active, for instance deliberately altering the water height of a wetland to make it more suitable for a particular species.”**

To see the complete study, visit here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-022-04617-0>

How can individuals help? While it’s always helpful to plant native species & encourage appropriate habitat in your own yard, you can also make a bigger difference. Support new legislation protecting local habitat; reach out to state representatives. If it seems overwhelming, a site like Defenders of Wildlife is a great jumping off point for finding easy-to-sign petitions, so even those of us in the biggest time crunch can speak out!

**Patrick Kuklinski** is a writer and bird lover living in Concord, NH. You can find more of his writing & raving about birds at [todaysbird.tumblr.com](https://todaysbird.tumblr.com).



also be used in tiger population estimation analysis, quality of vegetation of the kind of prey base available for the carnivores," says Sasikumar.



©Vishnu Vijayan, Conservation Biologist PaTCoF

The forest department staff use flashlights and GPS equipment as well as use an Android app called MSTRIPES (Monitoring System for Tigers: Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) which helps monitor the kind of patrolling activity that is done inside the Tiger Reserve and is updated into a central database. "We have found out that our patrolling teams are covering a cumulative distance of more than 20,000 kilometers every month, which shows the efforts of the field staff. All have walkie talkies and wireless sets for communication. For conserving the tiger, the most important part is to ensure that there is an adequate prey base so that tiger population has enough food as well as remove outside pressure of poaching," says Sasikumar.

The reserve does extensive habitat management interventions to ensure the prey base is intact. As this is a landscape without extensive swathes of rolling grasslands, the marshy grasslands here are locally called Vayals. "We have about 140 such grasslands and we ensure they remain as such. If you leave a grassland to its own device, something known as ecological succession will take place where the grassland will slowly start having incursions of woody plants. These woody plants will then give way to small trees, big trees and finally the place will become a forest and will remain in that vegetation structure. This is what is known as a climax eco-

system. We artificially manipulate the area in such a way that we do not allow the grasslands to succeed into the next stage, and we cut or remove the wood incursions to ensure that it remains a grassland," says Sasikumar. This ensures that the grasslands provide fodder for the herbivores, which will in turn support the tiger numbers.

**However, there are challenges too. "The only challenge is to maintain whatever has been done over the last seven to eight years and to keep the momentum to sustain our tremendous work. We have a track record of having zero poaching and that comes at the price of conducting extensive patrolling constantly," says Sasikumar.**

The work of the conservators has won them several awards that have added to their credentials, spread the message of conservation, and created awareness among the local community. "The stable tiger numbers means that the local community or the tribal persons work as anti-poaching watchers and are involved with the foundation in keeping the reserve alive. This is the most important tangible impact of our conservation efforts," says Sasikumar.

Parambikulam Foundation is the only entity that provides meaningful livelihood opportunities to the tribal inhabitants of Parambikulam Forest. A total of 266 members from local tribes are being meaningfully employed in Parambikulam Tiger Reserve through PaTCoF as protection watchers, tiger monitoring watchers, and for running various ecotourism programs.

**The innovative nature of the model is that resources are generated locally through low impact ecotourism, and it is being pumped back for the development of the local community and for protection and upgradation of the Tiger Reserve. This is thereby a self-sustaining model and being run without any additional financial burden of the public exchequer.**

**Bindu Gopal Rao** is a freelance writer and photographer based in Bengaluru. She has a special interest in the environment. She enjoys birdwatching and looking for local and unusual stories in any destination. You can follow her on Instagram @bindugoplr and view her work on [www.bindugopalrao.com](http://www.bindugopalrao.com).

## "The Golden Ruleism"



A long time member of Wildlife Watch has developed an easy-to-read booklet titled, *GoldenRuleism*, that he would like to share with our compassionate members. He said, "We see the booklet as both inspirational and aspirational. We purposely didn't take a religious, political, or controversial perspective. People will act on it – not argue about it. And it can be easily shared with others."

"This is not a reiteration of our Number One Rule. All-inclusive GoldenRuleism goes above and beyond the original. Compassion, empathy, and justice for everyone is at the heart of it."

Wildlife Watch Inc. and C.A.S.H. is happy to share the link with you: <https://tinyurl.com/GoldenRuleism>.

If you would like to learn more, or inquire about this publication, please contact [wildwatch@verizon.net](mailto:wildwatch@verizon.net) and put Golden Ruleism in the subject line.

# R.O.C.K. - Rehabbers Offer Care and Kindness

**The Wildlife Watch Hotline – 877-WILDHELP** receives hundreds of calls every year from across the country, and a few from Canada. Police departments, conservation agencies, SPCAs, veterinary offices, and federal, state, and municipal offices have referred callers to Wildlife Watch for help.

Your contribution to Wildlife Watch will help us to expand our volunteer service by allowing us to cover phones 24/7 and update our lists as new wildlife rehabilitators come on the scene.

<https://wildwatch.org/contribute>

Donate

The baby season has gotten off to a roaring start! We're receiving about 20 calls a day from across the country! **We have updated our lists, which should have shown an increase in the number of badly needed rehabbers. Instead, it has shown the opposite!**

As Wildlife Watch operates a national hotline for injured and orphaned wildlife, we receive calls from all over the country. Our unique listing allows us to locate rehabbers quickly – but only IF they are there. Sadly, each time we update our lists, there are fewer and fewer rehabbers. The attrition rate is extremely high, not surprisingly, due to a major problem: In every state, wildlife rehabilitators are licensed by a division of an environmental department that focuses on managing wildlife for hunting. **The direct oversight of rehabilitators is by a division that doesn't value individual wild animals and merely tolerates rehabbers. Instead, their main focus is on "game species" and increasing populations for hunters.**

Some animals who are wounded by hunters end up with rehabbers who are given no financial or even moral support for their selfless work. Yet more and more stringent regulations are imposed with regard to housing requirements, thus causing financial strain or rendering the rehabber unable to help.

Wildlife Watch would especially like to see funding in the next Governor's Budget Bill in NYS set aside



Photo by Gary Bendig on Unsplash.com.

for rehabbers who specialize in caring for rabies vector species (RVS), such as raccoons, skunks, and bats.

To be licensed to care for RVS, an individual would need a series of rabies shots that minimally cost about \$1,500. **Rehabbers are not allowed to charge for their selfless work, which includes the expensive construction of housing and repairs, purchase of food and supplies, and paying for veterinary care and medications.**

**We hope that rehabbers will one day be placed under a division of government that understands and values the excellent work that rehabbers do - and will both advocate for them and work towards annual state funding.**

Yet, letters such as this one, make it all worthwhile.

*Dear Friends at Wildlife Watch,*

*I found a baby bird fallen from the nest and thought, "Where can I find a rehabilitator?" I Googled and found your organization, called and got a real human immediately who was very helpful and gave me 2 referrals, and one of them answered me back in 5 minutes, delighted to take the baby bird. Baby is still doing fine some days later, I hear.*

*So happy to know that there are caring people who help and work together like you! There should be more wonderful groups like yours in the world. Thank you for what you do.*

*Lois*

## My View

Iguanas and pythons have been bought as pets, and what happened in most cases is that they grew larger than people expected and the owners couldn't or wouldn't care for them. At that point, the iguanas were discarded to fend for themselves, or, in the case of the pythons, dumped in places like the Florida Everglades where they have proliferated. **Another reason for the population growth was that during Hurricane Andrew in 1992, a breeding facility was destroyed, releasing countless pythons into swamps.** A female Burmese python can lay as many as 100 eggs. They can also grow to be as long as 20 feet and weigh up to 200 pounds. It's estimated that there are thousands of pythons in Florida. However, they are also extremely difficult to find if you are looking for one.

**To reduce their numbers, sadly, killing pythons has now become a sport. There is now a bounty on pythons.**

Iguanas have also flourished wherever they can. They can be seen in many settings all over Florida; i.e. in trees, open fields, and forests, as well as along the shore line near lakes and oceans. They are also able to swim and burrow deeply into the soil.

The first iguana I ever saw was in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. I was struck by this being, who looked like a dinosaur, but who was a vegan dining on flowers, and I have been enchanted with iguanas since that day.

As a resident of Florida I am always on the lookout for iguanas wherever I go. Iguanas have long claws, which enable them to climb trees, where they are most safe. They drape themselves over branches and move occasionally and slowly to eat nearby vegetation... leaves and fruit.

Iguanas are cold blooded animals, or ectotherms, which means they get their heat from the outside. They need the sun to sustain their body temperature. When temperatures reach into the 30's, 40's or even 50's, iguanas become immobile and can lose their grip and fall to the ground. They remain there in a state of suspended animation, unable to move, yet retaining all their bodily functions. Sadly, some will die from the trauma, while others are able to recover if they are lucky enough to fall in an area which has sunshine.

**This phenomenon occurred during a recent cold snap in Florida, when iguanas fell from the trees throughout South Florida. You can help them by**



*Iguana painting by Chris Arenella*

**warming a towel in the dryer and covering the iguana, and sometimes they are able to be revived. It is a pitiful sight to see a helpless iguana on his back unable to move. During an extreme weather episode in Florida in 2010, the iguana population was decimated. The population eventually rebounded, but this past winter many individuals were lost.**

Iguanas are also vilified because they burrow in gardens and eat ornamental flowers. I say to plant milkweed, which they don't like. It's wrong that homeowners are allowed to kill iguanas on their property. The exotic pet trade is responsible for the proliferation of iguanas.

One of my favorite iguanas was at Morikami Gardens. I've taken many photos and videos of him. He had a lot of orange in his skin, which can happen during mating season. I've been back twice hoping to see him to no avail. I hope he survived.

**I believe that animals are not our toys or trinkets. Let's think again before we mount an animal on a wall or buy a handbag made out of an animal.**

**Chris Arenella** has rescued many animals. She loves being in nature and the peace it brings.

**If you are interested in voicing your views on topics related to wildlife and the environment for possible publication, kindly email your view to [wildwatch@verizon.net](mailto:wildwatch@verizon.net) and put "My View" in the subject line.**



**Boat-billed Heron (Cochlearius cochlearius phillipsi)**



Painting and photo ©Barry Kent MacKay

Another wonderful painting by Barry Kent MacKay.

Barry wrote: *Although this is one of my favourite birds, I have only so far painted it once, as a miniature painting, really a study, in mixed media. This recently completed painting is approximately life-sized. They are about the size of a night-heron or a large crow, weighing in around 600 grams or nearly a pound and a half. They eat a wide variety of live food, including fish, amphibians, snakes, lizards, large insects, eggs, crabs and other aquatic life. These birds are found from southern Mexico south into tropical South America, both along the coasts, where they favour mangroves, and in wooded swamps and wetlands throughout the interior. Their population has been estimated to be as low as half a million to as many as five or six million.*

**Barry Kent MacKay** is a prolific bird artist. If you would like join his list for wonderful paintings and personal stories of the birds, please contact him at: [mimus@sympatico.ca](mailto:mimus@sympatico.ca).



**NEED HELP FOR  
INJURED OR  
ORPHANED WILDLIFE?**



**Call the  
Wildlife Watch Hotline!  
1-877-WILDHEL(P)  
(1-877-945-3435)**

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Anne Muller, Editor

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