



'A country's Fauna is it's sacred trust': Hunting for the Conservationist Corbett through Literature

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Abstract

Among the legacies of the British colonial rule in India, there exists a brutal reminder that the empire left in its wake: India, like many other colonies, suffered from a brutal desecration of her forest cover and her wildlife—both for profit and for pleasure—at the hands of her White masters. Yet the first calls for conservation also came from Europeans—often Englishmen—though their voices went largely ignored and unheeded at the time. One of the first people to speak up for conservation in India was Edward James 'Jim' Corbett (1875- 1955), who lends his name to India's first national park. This dissertation seeks to explore Jim Corbett as a pioneer of conservation efforts in India and re-write his status in history as a hunter who indulged in pointless killing, like his other counterparts who took up hunting as a sport. The lessons he learnt as a child—to love and respect the forest and her inhabitants—were lessons that stayed with him throughout his life. The paper will focus mainly on Corbett's books—*Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, *The Temple Tiger and Other Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, *My India*, *Jungle Lore* and the posthumously published *Tree Tops*—as well as Corbett's articles and letters as compiled in *My Kumaon* (edited by R.E Hawkins). The research as it stands at this point depends mainly on Corbett's own works and is augmented by secondary sources such as books and articles, both on Jim Corbett and on conservation activities in India. The research seeks also to go beyond the literary domain and certain questions that arise when one observes conservation efforts presently taking place across the globe, including—but not limited to—the evolution of the role and ethics of trophy hunting in present-day conservation and the issues conservationists often face today.

Keywords

Jim Corbett, conservation, colonization, British India, hunting

Hunting or *shikar* was an integral part of the colonial experience in India. There were two kinds of sportsmen: English army officers and civil servants who came to the hills to enjoy a bout of sport during leave, and officers who lived and served at the frontiers; the former visited only a few times on the ‘trip of a lifetime’, while the latter lived and hunted shoulder to shoulder with the local populace as a means of expanding the interests of the Empire (Swati, 14). To have secured the biggest tiger skin or the deer with the largest, most intricate antlers was a matter of pride, a tale of adventure to be told proudly by the fireside when one was back in England. It was, more importantly, a testament to what it meant to be ‘English’—a display of the typical English qualities of courage, hardihood and fair play; qualities that were widely assumed to have enabled Englishmen to subjugate and colonize the wilderness in the East (it was, essentially, a matter of keeping up appearances: those familiar with George Orwell’s ‘Shooting an Elephant’ will recall how the speaker had to shoot the elephant against his will because he was a White man and could not be seen as weak or vacillating against a wild animal in front of the local people who regarded him as a saviour). ‘Until he has shot his tiger in the hot and steaming forests of the plains’, writes British colonel A.J Stone of his fellow officers, ‘...he considers he has not accomplished his manifest destiny’.

It was usually herbivores who were considered ‘game’: deer, antelopes, wild buffaloes. Bird-hunting was popular, too, as was pig-sticking, which comprised going after a wild boar on horseback and trying to stick a spear into it. *Shikar* expeditions were also used as a means to welcome visiting dignitaries to India, especially to the Princely states, as was made evident by the Prince of Wales’ tour in India from 1920 to 1921 accompanied by the future Lord Louis Mountbatten. ‘It was one of the best mornings I have ever spent anywhere’, wrote young Dickie after a morning of pig-sticking in Jodhpur (Tunzelmann, 58).

There were certain unwritten principles one was supposed to adhere to during *shikar*: it was usually the male of the species that was considered fair game and a proper opponent for the tough White hunter, for example, and one had to give the animal a chance to defend itself (Swati, 9-10). But these were conventions usually left behind in exclusive British clubs and in the camps: the hunters shot indiscriminately (a practice Corbett would deplore), a mother animal with cubs would be coveted targets: The British found the mother’s helpless rage and attempts to defend her cubs brave and rather tragically romantic. A mother would also put up a greater and more ferocious fight, enabling the White hunter to better display his famed calm, collected courage in the face of danger. The animal would then be displayed as a trophy, while her cubs would be taken away and reared as pets. Keeping wild animals as pets is correctly regarded today as unethical and dangerous, but it was a common practice back in the day (Anderson, 65).

Tigers and leopards were declared ‘vermin’ by the British government because they frequently devoured cattle belonging to villagers living at the edge of the forest

(Swati, 15). There were roughly two categories of tiger hunters. The *bandobastwala* paid or influenced local people to drive out a tiger in front of him, following which he would shoot the animal from a *machan* or a *howdah*. This group included people pressed for time, such as visiting dignitaries. Solo hunters went after the target on foot, reading the jungle for signs of the quarry. The latter was considered the more dangerous for one could never be sure of where the animal was hiding. A moment's mistake could cost the hunter his life (Kala, 85).

Under such circumstances and socio-cultural norms came the first calls for conservation, that too from a rather unlikely source: Jim Corbett, acclaimed hunter and organizer of hunting expeditions, spoke up for India's fauna, particularly the tiger. This aspect of the hunter-conservationist sadly remains unexplored.

Jim Corbett was born and brought up in the Himalayas. The Corbett family had their summer home in Nainital but moved to a village cottage for the winter. Meat was rare and hard to come by in the hills until one was good with a gun, so hunting became a major source of food for the Corbetts. The boys would venture into the forest armed with handguns and rifles while very young and come home bearing bags of game—the Corbetts would keep some for consumption and distribute the rest among their tenants in the village (Booth, 51). Jim, for his part, learnt shooting from Tom, the oldest of the Corbett children and Jim's boyhood hero. Tom taught the young Jim not only to look out for birds that could be consumed but also to utilize each and every part of a creature one had killed, including cleaning the hide, often making stuffed animals to be displayed at home. It was also from Tom and Tom's faithful retainer Kunwar Singh that Jim learned to love and respect the forest, to allow it time to replenish before one made repeated use of its resources. It was unsportsmanlike, for example, to kill birds while roosting, or to kill birds taking care of their young. Jim retained these lessons throughout his life—which was more than what one could say for many of his sporting brethren, and over time these lessons would extend to big game: Corbett recounts how, while on a mission to kill the man-eating tiger of Chuka, he sat on a *machan* over a buffalo carcass and saw a tigress approach the kill with her cubs. He watched, fascinated, as the mother taught her children how to locate the kill and how to keep an eye out for dangers before finally settling down to feed. He later wrote of the encounter: 'I did not know the, and it would make no difference to me if I had, that the tigress I watched with such interest that day would later, owing to gunshot wounds, become a man-eater and a terror to all who lived and worked in the Ladhya valley and the surrounding villages (Corbett, 350).

India suffered desecration of her forest cover at the hands of the British, but the earliest calls for conservation also came from White men. The Second World War had depleted many men's appetite for unnecessary violence. Also, by the middle of the 20th century, the effects of indiscriminate killing had begun to be felt: herbivores had drastically increased and was beginning to adversely affect crops in settlements at the edge of the forest. The animals responsible—deer, antelopes, boars and such

like—had hitherto been protected so that the White man could hunt, but tigers and leopards had been classified as ‘vermin’ and had been killed in such numbers that the herbivore population could no longer be naturally controlled.

These were, to a large extent, White men’s problems: it was beginning to affect both their pleasure in the sport and their status as the protector of the Indian people. India’s native residents of the time could afford to pay little attention to these problems. The Act of 1878 designated large swatches of forest as game reserves and relieved the native population from access to them, meaning Indians would no longer be permitted to graze cattle or to shoot in the now Government-owned forests (Swathi, 101). These were now exclusively the haunt of the English elite—those who could afford to pay for a license and a game fee (these had been waived for Corbett: The Government recognized him to be a lover of forests and one who would not misuse any privileges granted to him, so he was granted the ‘Freedom of the Forests’, the only other people who enjoyed these benefits being the District Commissioner and the Police Superintendent of Kumaon) (Swathi, 232). Many men from the villages on the periphery of forests were forced to turn to poaching. The present-day image of a poacher is one of the illegal hunters evading game wardens and shooting endangered animals for smuggling, but a 20th century rural Indian poacher was simply a man looking for meat to feed his family, perhaps with a little to spare to sell in the village market. For many it was their only source of meat. And many of these poachers were from underprivileged, impoverished tribal communities: Kenneth Anderson’s cherished native associates, Ranga and Byra, were both members of the Poojaree community.

Kunwar Singh, who is mentioned several times in *My India* and *Jungle Lore* and whose contribution played a pivotal role in helping Jim understand the forest, was a much-respected village head who was once a poacher by profession. It appears at first glance a rather uncomfortable association: the honourable, sporting English gentleman associating with a one who kills animals unlawfully and by stealth. The fact remains, however, that Kunwar Singh (and many others like him) were not poachers’ eco-criticism-explain the term in the sense that we understand the word today. They were simple, poor rural folk, armed with decrepit shotguns or rifles passed down from generation to generation, who hunted just enough to feed their families or, perhaps, to sell a little in the local marketplace. It was, in most cases, their only source of protein—rivers in the hills did not always permit fishing, and people like Kunwar Singh would never be permitted to hunt in Government-owned forests. Kunwar Singh could at least claim some privilege by virtue of caste, for he was a *Thakur* cite, but many poachers were men from underprivileged and dispossessed tribal groups or the lower castes (this is especially true for South India—both of Kenneth Anderson’s cherished companions, Ranga and Byra, were poachers from the Poojaree community). These poachers served as guides to many Englishmen who set foot in India’s jungles for the first time and loyally taught them

the manners of the forest. John Rivett-Carnac, who grew up in Bengal's jungles, remembers fondly: 'We ran completely wild, climbing trees, shooting small birds, looking for birds' nests and seeing how far into the forest we could go. We used to set traps for wild cats at night with a hill boy from a jungle tribe who helped to look after us and taught us jungle lore. He showed us what was dangerous and what was not' (Allen, 29).

The English man or woman's killing of a leopard or the tiger was seen not only as an act of bravery but as the fulfillment of the paternalistic role many colonizers seemed to adopt towards the people they had colonized. To go after man-eaters was considered an even greater duty. These, at least, were the reasons given: most White men in truth enjoyed going after carnivorous animals because their ferocity provided them with what they felt was adequate challenge. John Mackenzie writes: 'The rediscovery of forests and mountains, particularly those in the genuine wild, brought human beings face to face with, and forced them to participate in, nature in the raw'.

British sportsmen also took great pride in distinguishing themselves from their indigenous counterparts, who were commonly regarded as lazy, superstitious, sly and usually unmindful of any suffering they could cause animals while hunting. What really was the case was that indigenous hunters saw themselves as part of nature and not distinct from it, and as such their approach to killing or to using natural resources in general was very different from the White man's: there is a Shimshali folk song where the hunter apologizes to a baby Ibex before killing its mother. The instances where villagers would refuse to sell cattle or livestock for bait not for economic reasons but because it would be blasphemous to send an animal thus to die are not few. White men, in any case, simply could not do without native huntsmen, especially when going after carnivores. This obviously did not sit well with them, and there were efforts to undermine these huntsmen's courage or to even raise questions on whether they were really necessary.

Hunting thus conceived in the sense of 'sport' had several problems. To begin with, man-eaters often became man-eaters because of human activity—a wounded and incapacitated animal allowed to get away, for example. Often the villagers would be ill-equipped to deal with an angry carnivore, armed as they would be only with rusty spears or broken matchlocks. The onus of the wounds inflicted would be on villagers, but it was not as if White men never shouldered blame. *Shikar* expeditions, whether or not after man-eaters, were meant to draw the native population closer to their White overlords, but even here they failed miserably. The Corbetts and Kenneth Andersons were few and far between. Most White hunters were condescending to local people at best and rude and overbearing at the worst, meaning the local people refused to help them with bait, news of the man-eater or with showing them the local terrain. No hunter would succeed without it. Both Corbett and Anderson repeatedly underline the importance of mutual respect between the hunter and the local

population during a *shikar* expedition (Anderson, incidentally, is called the Jim Corbett of South India).

Corbett's encounters with man-eaters commenced while he was in the employment of the Railways. His first kill happened to be the first man-eater Garhwal had ever seen: the Champawat tigress, which crossed the mountains to India from Nepal and killed around 250 human beings (Corbett, 14). Man-eaters differ from ordinary tigers and leopards in their heightened cunning and their lack of fear of human beings. A man-eater would charge or stalk while an ordinary animal would flee at the sight of man. Corbett, hitherto familiar only with the latter, was moved by the loss of human life and decided to go after the animal. He had rather frightening and unpleasant experiences (including one of the supernatural kinds), but he finally succeeded in bagging the animal. It would be the first in a series of many successes that would go on to earn him the moniker of Kumaon's 'White Sadhu'.

What prompted most sportsmen to go after man-eaters was either fame or monetary reward. Corbett detested both as unsportsmanlike (Corbett, 452-453). He was an extremely reticent man, although kind and gentlemanly, and did not hanker for money, though he was equipped with a shrewd business sense and spent and saved wisely. His expeditions were prompted by the deep regard he had for the hill-folk. He also, however, respected and admired his four-footed adversaries: Corbett displayed none of the dismissive attitude that sportsmen of his time seemed to display towards the residents of the forests, seeing them as fellow creatures rather than inferior beings to be elevated to trophies. He described the tiger as a 'large-hearted gentleman' and deplored the use of phrases such as 'as cruel as a tiger': he regarded animals as far more civil than humankind, and in any case carnivores attacked only when they were hungry or in self-defense and rarely engaged in wanton killing, unlike man: 'Had the Creator made the same law for man as He has made for the jungle folk, there would be no wars, for the strong in man would have the same consideration for the weak as is the established law of the jungles' (Corbett, 81). Of the tiger, he wrote: '...a tiger is a large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage and that when he is exterminated—as exterminated he will be unless public opinion rallies to his support—India will be the poorer, having lost the finest of her fauna' (Corbett, 7). Corbett's friend, Lord Malcolm Hailey, noted that Corbett struck a balance between helping people and going after animals simply looking to survive. Villagers would come to him with requests to gun down an animal that was killing their cattle. Corbett listened attentively to their complaints but seldom went after cattle-killers, often offering to compensate the aggrieved owner rather than kill the animal. He took the firm stand that the king of the jungle must have his share: 'The lord of the jungle must have his due. The killing of cattle and goats was not a capital offence; willful homicide must be proved. But once proved, he would not stay his hand until the malefactor had been executed...The tiger was entitled to his due, but man came first' (Corbett, 26). Besides, with the years, tigers and leopards became

increasingly dependent on cattle for food because the wild stock of 'game' had been depleted by hunters and they had nothing else to eat. This problem, incidentally, continues to persist as men continue to push the boundaries of the jungle and encroach on wild territory: increasing instances have been reported of animal-human conflict and of the cruel but increasingly desperate measures poverty-stricken villagers have been forced to take to defend their livestock or crops from hungry wildlife.

But Corbett bore man-eaters no grudge; if anything, he saw them as victims who had been forced by circumstance to turn to the most unnatural prey of all—man. He did not condone their actions, of course, but he understood the reasons behind the actions and treated the animals with empathy and dignity even after he had killed them. Corbett was neither bloodthirsty nor particularly fond of killing as one would imagine a hunter to be. Most of the tigers he killed were either old or wounded by porcupine quills or human activities (such as poaching or aspiring sportsmen allowing a wounded animal to get away) and thus unable to go after deer or other similar natural prey. Leopards were usually quicker and more cunning and thus got wounded far less frequently, but leopards, too, acquired a taste for human flesh through human actions. Both the Panar leopard and the famous Rudraprayag leopard had turned man-eater by feasting on cholera-riddled corpses left in jungles for want of last rites. The Rudraprayag leopard brought much grief not only to Garhwal but also to India, for it operated near the track that enabled the pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri, and tales were rife about its fiendish cunning and supernatural being. The leopard frustrated Corbett to no end, almost making a victim of him on more than one occasion, but Corbett's description of him after he is shot dead is extremely poignant: 'Here was only an old leopard, who differed from others of his kind in that his muzzle was grey and his lips lacked whippers; the best-hated and the most feared animal in all India, whose only crime—not against the laws of nature, but against the laws of man—was that he had shed human blood, with no object of terrorizing man, but only in order that he might live; and who now, with his chin resting on the rim of the hole and his eyes half-closed, was peacefully sleeping his last long sleep' (Corbett, 598).

Corbett, it is to be noted, did his best to display that oft-boasted sense of fairness English hunters claimed to possess. One had to employ a certain degree of cunning against man-eaters, it is true, and one cannot cling to moral compunctions when human lives are at stake, but Corbett did not like to employ underhanded means even when killing these dangerous animals. He killed the Mohan man-eater most unexpectedly: he chanced upon the animal from behind while it was asleep and shot it twice in the head. It died without ever waking up. Corbett did not relish the manner of his killing, writing: '...but the regret remains that through the fear of consequences to myself, or fear of losing the only chance I might ever get, or possibly a combination of the two, I did not awaken the sleeping animal and give him a sporting chance' (Corbett, 377). He also did not use man-eating as an excuse to indiscriminately kill

tigers: some innocent casualties were inevitable, but as a rule Corbett tried not to kill until he was sure his quarry was the man-eater. Nor did he kill a man-eater's cubs until they do were actively dangerous to human beings, for he did not subscribe to the common misconception that cubs reared on human flesh also become man-eaters, for man is never a wild animal's natural prey. The only exception to Corbett's sporting instincts was wrought by the Rudraprayag leopard: Corbett abhorred the use of poison but had no choice but to use it if it meant there was even a slight chance it would kill the leopard. The plan did not succeed: the leopard appeared to be immune to poison, and it demonstrated the ability to locate poisoned portions of a kill and to eat only the rest (Corbett, 488).

His killing of the Rudraprayag leopard won Corbett several accolades, both from the common people and from the Government, with the latter bestowing several honours on him such as the *Kaiser-I-Hind* Gold Medal, the Order of the British Empire and the Star of India. Kumaon still celebrates the death of the dreaded killer by holding a fair to commemorate the day Corbett killed the leopard (Swati, 51-52). It must be noted, however, that while Corbett acknowledged the Government's efforts to deal with the man-eater and was pleased to have helped in the same regard, nothing could be further than rewards from his mind. Fame and rewards were, to him, results of his encounters with man-eaters or other dangerous animals, not their objective. What he did, he did to save human lives: 'There have been occasions when life has hung by a thread and others when a light purse and disease resulting from exposure and strain have made the going difficult, but for all these occasions I am amply rewarded if my hunting has resulted in saving one human life' (Corbett, 235).

Corbett's transition from hunter to conservationist was subtle and gradual. His expertise at reading the forest and its flora and fauna had endeared him and earned him respect not only with the hill-folk but with Indian and European dignitaries, for whom he was often requested to arrange expeditions (it was during one such expedition that he damaged his hearing, on the eve of leaving to kill the Talla Des man-eater). His friends included Prime Ministers and Viceroys. His books record two instances where he killed animals that were not man-eaters: the Bachelor of Powlagarh, a tiger of exceptional size and appearance, and the Pepul Pani tiger, an animal he had seen grow up from a cub and who he killed 'under a misapprehension': he had feared that the animal was about to turn man-eater due to a gunshot wound in the leg, but found upon examining the carcass that the wound had almost healed. He deeply regretted the incident, writing: 'Pleasure at having secured a magnificent trophy...was not unmixed with regret, for never again would the jungle-folk and I listen with bated breath to his deep-throated call resounding through the foothills, and never again would his familiar pugmarks show on the game paths that he and I had trodden for fifteen years' (Corbett, 189). D. C. Kala estimates that it was probably the photographer Frederick Champion who first drew Corbett's attention to conservation (Kala, 160). Wildlife had begun rapidly dwindling during Corbett's time in India due to

indiscriminate hunting by members of the Raj. Champion and Jean Ibbotson (Kala, 163) fostered Corbett's interest in photography. Corbett's man-eater-hunting years were, too, coming to an end: he was growing older, had already suffered two bouts of illness and his sisters were increasingly uncomfortable with his pursuit of dangerous beasts. Corbett's last man-eater was the tigress of Thak, following which he no longer hunted and confined himself to photograph, writing: 'Apart from the difference in cost between shooting with a camera and shooting with a rifle, and the beneficial effect it has on our rapidly decreasing stock of tigers, the taking of a good photograph gives far more pleasure to the sportsman than the acquisition of a trophy...the photograph is of interest to all lovers of wild life, while the trophy is only of interest to the individual who has acquired it' (Corbett, 186).

One also wonders at Corbett's first brief stint with the Bengal and North-Eastern Railways, where Corbett was required to fell and transport swathes of forest for timber. The Corbetts were a very middle-class family and Jim had been required to begin working immediately after leaving school, taking up the first job that came his way. He does not write of it anywhere, but one wonders how the ardent lover of forests reconciled himself with clearing miles and miles of it for industrial and economic purposes. Corbett remained attached with the Railways for the duration of his professional life. The life was one of hard work and did not leave much room for hunting, which meant he had to go for long periods without meat, but he speaks fondly of the expeditions he undertook with fellow Europeans by moonlight (Corbett, 350).

The question remains as to what exactly turned Corbett's attention to conservation. There was probably no one particular incident, but an event might have helped forcefully turn his thoughts to the subject. Reverend A. G. Atkins, who once attended one of Corbett's talks in Nainital, asked him what had prompted the shift from hunter to photographer. Corbett recounted to him a shooting expedition he had attended in the company of three British officers in North India. The officers came upon a very large gathering of waterfowl and proceeded to kill as many as they possibly could—well over three hundred. They could neither carry away the birds nor eat them. The wanton, bloodthirsty nature of the act horrified Jim, who believed in killing judiciously; it 'sickened me and opened my eyes to what ordinary uninhibited hunting and shooting meant' (Booth, 170).

Corbett's calls for conservation came at a time when environmental awareness in India was still, for all practical purposes, in the cradle. The country, in any case, had more apparently pressing matters at hand: Independence was on the threshold, the shadow of communal violence loomed large, and many Europeans (including the Corbetts) would soon leave India thanks to growing anti-English sentiment and settle across the world. The Corbetts would spend their twilight years in Kenya, at the time still a British colony. Yet Corbett did all that he could to spread awareness: he would visit schools and regale children with stories of his adventures,

show them both moving pictures and still-lives and imitate bird and animal calls. Corbett had an uncanny talent for the latter. His imitation of a tiger's mating call had lured the Thak tigress to him (after which he shot her), and he was called to lend his voice for these sounds for a 1948 production of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Corbett did not particularly like the result—he is said to have noted that the best actor in the film was the tiger). Corbett never made any money from these ventures: (Corbett, 202) his only reward was the thought that he was doing something to save the jungles and the animals he so loved. He also wrote a number of passionate essays and letters on the subject; these reveal that Jim's efforts towards animal conservation did not remain restricted to India. He carried on with the, albeit in limited capacity, after his departure to Kenya. He wrote, for example, to R.E Hawkins that his only motive behind joining a Kenyan film company that catered exclusively to sportsmen was 'to discourage killing and encourage photography' (Corbett, 205).

The pen, which brought Corbett much fame, was also his chief instrument in his fight for conservation. He had begun to write on the subject as early as 1926 in journals and newspapers, both under his own name and a pseudonym. Jim's famous 'Wildlife in the Village: An Appeal' was published in 1932 in Nainital's *Review of the Week*, where he called for conservation and listed some of the ways in which unwary human activity threatened wildlife: 'A country's fauna is a sacred trust, and I appeal to you not to betray this trust. Shooting over water, shooting over salt-licks, natural and artificial, shooting birds in the close season and when roosting at night, encouraging permit-holders to shoot hinds, fencing off of large areas of forest and the extermination by the Forest Department of all game within these areas, making of unnecessary motor tracks through the forest and shooting from motor cars, absence of sanctuaries and the burning of forests by the Forest Department and by villagers at a time when the forests are full of young life are all contributing to one end—the extermination of our fauna. If we do not bestir ourselves now, it will be to our discredit that the fauna of our province was exterminated in our generation and under our very eyes, while we looked on and never raised a finger to prevent it'. He observed in the same essay: 'I believe that much of the slaughter of deer that is daily taking place throughout the length and breadth of the Bhabar and Tarai would cease if an appeal was made to the better feelings of man' (Corbett, 133).

In 1934, more than 300 square kilometers of forests in the Ramganga river valley area were set aside for a sanctuary wherein hunting would be prohibited for five years to enable the rapidly declining tiger population in the area to breed and replenish successfully. The Reserve was made permanent in 1935 under the United Provinces National Parks Bill and named after Lord Malcolm Hailey, Governor of the province. Corbett, who had worked to help establish the park, was delighted. It also provided him with many opportunities for his beloved photography. The Park was later renamed in his honour. 'The reserve...is...one of the very few remaining places on earth where the tigers are truly wild in their own natural environment', writes

Martin Booth, Corbett's unofficial biographer. 'The tigers are breeding very successfully as a result. Jim would love it' (Booth, 199).

Hunting in India gradually began to decline in the years following the Second World War because most people lost the appetite for unnecessary violence. 'Having spent a year in the trenches in France I had no desire to kill or be killed,' says John Morris. 'I paid lip service to *shikar* to the extent that I owned a shotgun and a rifle, but I don't think I ever fired off either of them'. Many who tried it found they did not like it, like a man who shot a brown bear and 'thought of all the little teddy bears that I'd ever seen before and hated myself'. But that was hardly good news for wildlife: indiscriminate killing had depleted India's fauna and especially her tiger population so much that steps had now to be taken to help nature replenish without hoping it would happen on its own. Corbett's warnings were timely, but sadly unheeded. His essays and articles failed to create the controversy he'd hoped they would, and his initiatives to save wildlife in and around Chhoti Haldwani often brought him in conflict with Europeans and Indians alike. In 1946, for example, a man complained of a cattle-killer in his vicinity and demanded it be shot. Jim refused, following which the man stood before the Corbetts' cottage and screamed obscenities at Jim and his kind. He then left to take care of the tiger himself. Frightened for the man's safety, Jim killed the tiger, though 'it made him very sad' (Kala, 156).

The problems Corbett wrote and spoke of as facing the Indian jungle are still very much present; one might say they have grown more complex. Man-eaters, of course, have grown rare, except in the Sunderbans where tigers still carry fishermen and honey-collectors off. Garhwal, for its part, has enjoyed years of peace. But the fight for space and resource between man and animal continues. Leopards frequently carry off stray dogs in Mumbai. Elephants are warded off plots of cultivated land by electric fences and chilli powder. There are reports in the news tigers and elephants accidentally stepping in front of moving trains. Tigers, leopards and even smaller carnivores like fishing cats that wander into human settlements are beaten to death, as demonstrated recently in West Bengal. The case of the pregnant Kerala elephant that swallowed a pineapple bomb and died a slow and painful death moved the country to tears. These are hardly one-time incidents, and such instances will sadly continue to grow in number as human population increases and nature is pushed back. The animals, of course, are not at fault—they are displaced, hungry, frightened. But one also hesitates to always condemn man: the poor Sundarbans fishermen who cannot afford to stay at home or to move to other places in search of new work; the farmers whose lives revolve around their fields and their crops; frightened people whose first instinct is to get rid of an animal that, according to popular perception, could kill or maim at the slightest provocation. The latter is a problem that stems for ignorance, for there are still many misconceptions regarding animal behaviour. Most animals do not attack unless threatened or cornered and animals who have accidentally found their way into human habitation are equally if

not more frightened than the people around them. There is little attempt to spread awareness about issues such as these; there is a lack of clear directive regarding what one ought to do in such situations (other than the obvious step of informing the Forest Department), and in the battle to survive neither man nor animal can be expected to yield the slightest of ground.

Corbett had been disappointed by the approaches of both the British Government and the post-Independence Indian government to conservation. The situation has improved, but not much. India—and a number of other countries across the world—have slowly adopted stricter measure against animal smuggling and poaching. Endangered animals are slowly multiplying, albeit under protection: Kaziranga recently celebrated a 200-odd increase in the number of rhinos. Scientists across the world are working to genetically breed and bring back extinct animals. But animal smuggling and poaching continue, fostered by superstition and greed: game wardens are compelled to saw off rhino horns to protect the animals from poachers. Rhino horns when ground and consumed are consumed aphrodisiacs; tiger teeth and claws are considered to bring good luck to the bearer. Conservation efforts are also hindered by corruption and political lobbying, often at the highest levels: Donald Trump Jr., son of former American President Donald Trump, was allowed to shoot an endangered and Government-protected sheep during a visit to Mongolia. Trump Jr. and his brother Eric also happen to be big-game hunters. There are photos of the brothers posing with animals they have killed. These happen to be endangered animals like leopards and elephants—calls for whose protection echo across the world.

Conservationists and environmentalists, burdened as they are by corruption, red tape, Government indifference and public apathy and by the constant lack of funds, also face arrest and threats to their lives. Environment activist Joanna Stutchbury, reportedly Jim Corbett's last living relative, was shot dead near her home in Kenya, where she worked to protect forests against land-grabbers. She had been repeatedly threatened prior to her death because of her campaign against developing wetlands in a national park.

Environmental discourse today has expanded to include conversations on climate change and the natural imbalances that affect both man and beast. Attempts to do away with fossil fuels and introduce other, greener form of energy—such as wind, solar or nuclear energy—are hampered by political lobbying, potential unemployment in certain sectors, ignorance and fear-mongering. The latter apply especially to the nuclear industry, where the shadows of Chernobyl and Fukushima still loom large. Dependence of fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources have far-reaching consequences: Dependence on Russian oil and gas has, for example, prevented the West from taking decisive action against Russian aggression for years. Current attempts in the direction are prompted only by Russia's attack on Ukraine. Young people who speak out for bans against coal and oil and in favour of a 'greener'

lifestyle—the most recognizable face being Greta Thunberg and her Fridays for the Future movement—are derided and ridiculed. Even as discussions continue, scientists issue warnings that the world is, too rapidly, reaching a point of no return from climate change—a catastrophe that will mean famine, homelessness, loss of habitat and mass displacement and death for both animals and human beings. Not that this is not already happening—the indigenous people of the forests and the tribal communities are gradually being pushed back and driven away from lands they have occupied for centuries in the name of expansion and industrialization.

Sadhus in India are credited with supernatural powers and the gift of second sight, and here Corbett's moniker of White Sadhu becomes eerily accurate: his predictions regarding the future of wildlife in India and across the world are turning out to be correct and his worst fears are being realized. It is perhaps time both Corbett's readers and environmentalists across the world stop looking at him simply as a hunter and a relic of a lost Empire and start considering the wisdom and foresight in his words. His final advice to Mary Corbett could serve as a guide today to all those seeking to make the world a better place, for both animal and man: 'Always be brave, and try and make the world a happier place for others to live in' (Booth, 210).

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