

Flora and Fauna of India



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	(v)
1. Introduction	1
2. Forest Resources of India	6
3. Popular Wildlife Sanctuaries in India	10
4. Flora and Fauna of Odisha (Orissa)	72
5. Flora of India	76
6. Famous Trees	146
7. Shrubs of India	211
<i>Bibliography</i>	245
<i>Index</i>	247

Preface

The total forested area in India is about 63.73 million hectares. These forests supply a wide variety of resources. They provide structural timber and wood for making furniture and pulp, match wood, wood for charcoal, gum, resins, canes and fibres. Beside these, there are many other forest products such as leaves, fruits, tan dyes, medicinal herbs, bee-wax, honey, turpentine oil and lac. Indian forestry faces many problems. Over grazing and forest fire often destroy forests. Reckless cutting of the trees causes forest destruction. Jhum cultivations destroy forest, it invites soil erosion. To preserve the forest, the government of India has taken up a series of programmes: The forests are declared as Reserved Forests. The government has chalked out a good programme of 'Van Mahotsava'.

Thousands of trees are planted every year in the months of July and August to promote new forestation. The Forest Research Institute has been set up at Dehra Dun for the promotion and preservation of the forests property. Heaven for the wildlife enthusiasts India is a land of the mighty tiger, the graceful peacock, the beautiful King Cobra and the great elephant.

Blessed in terms of topography, location, climate and nature, India's wildlife is comparable to the best in the world. Set apart for its rich bio-diversity, unique ecosystem and fascinating wildlife India features among the 12 mega diversity areas in the world. With almost 4% of its land

under forests cover India is home to innumerable national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Being a large country the dark and dense wilderness of India which supports the other forms of life is thrilling for one and all. Be it the lofty Himalayan regions of north India, the semi arid desert regions of west India or the swampy wet regions of Eastern India, wildlife in India is specific and unique to its geographic area.

According to statistics currently India is home to about 390 species of mammals. 210 amphibians, 455 reptiles. 1,230 bird specie and 30,000 species of insects. This makes India one of the richest country's in terms of wildlife. As far as India's plant life is concerned there are 1500 species of plants which are of different origins.

Famous for their captivating landscapes and varied flora and fauna the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in India are built over large expanse of tropical greenery. The many wildlife sanctuaries and national parks in the country offer ample oppotrunities to explore the fascinating and extraordinary flora and fauna.

—*Author*

Introduction

India is home to abundant plant and animal life and has a wide range of climates that accommodate a diversity of species throughout the country. Broadly classified, there are seven major regions for plant and animal life in India: the arid Indus Plain, the Gangetic Plain, the Himalayas, Assam Valley, the Malabar Coast, the peninsular plateau, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

India has an estimated 45,000 species of plants, 33 percent of which are native. There are 15,000 flowering plant species, 6 percent of the world's total. About 3,000 to 4,000 of the total number of plant species are believed to be in danger of extinction.

In the arid areas that adjoin Pakistan, the eastern part of the Indus Plain, most plant life is sparse and herblike. Various thorny species, including capers (spiny shrubs with pale flowers) and jujubes (fruit-producing trees with veined leaves and yellowish flowers), are common. Bamboo grows in some areas, and among the few varieties of trees is the palm.

The Gangetic Plain, which has more moisture, supports many types of plant life. Vegetation is especially luxuriant in the southeastern part of the plains region, where the mangrove and the sal, a hardwood timber tree, flourish.

In the Himalayas many varieties of arctic flora are found on the higher slopes. The lower levels of the mountain range support many types of subtropical plant life, notably the orchid. Dense forests remain in the few areas where agriculture and commercial forestry have had little effect. Coniferous trees, including cedar and pine, predominate in the northwestern Himalayan region. On the Himalayas' eastern slopes, tropical and subtropical types of vegetation abound. Here rhododendrons grow to tree height. Among the predominant trees are oak and magnolia.

The Assam Valley features evergreen forests, bamboo, and areas of tall grasses. The Malabar Coast, which receives a large amount of rainfall, is thickly wooded. Evergreens, bamboo, and several varieties of valuable timber trees, including teak, predominate in this region. Extensive tracts of impenetrable jungle are found in the swampy lowlands and along the lower elevations of the Western Ghats. The vegetation of the peninsular plateau is less luxuriant, but thickets of bamboo, palm, and deciduous trees grow throughout the Deccan Plateau. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have tropical forests, both evergreen and semi evergreen.

India is inhabited by a wide variety of animal life, including almost 5,000 species of larger animals. Several species of the cat family—including the tiger, panther, Asiatic lion, Asiatic cheetah, snow leopard, jungle cat, and clouded leopard—live in some areas of India. Most of these species are under threat of extinction. Elephants roam the lower slopes of the central and eastern Himalayan foothills and the remote forests of the southern Deccan Plateau. Other large quadrupeds (four-footed animals) native to India include rhinoceroses (under threat of extinction), black bear, wolf, jackal, dhole (wild Asian dog), wild buffalo, wild hog,

antelope, and deer. Several species of monkeys live throughout the country.

Various species of wild goats and sheep, including ibexes and serows, are found in the Himalayas and other mountainous areas. The pygmy hog, bandicoot rat, and tree mouse are typical types of smaller native quadrupeds; bats are also abundant. Venomous reptiles, including the cobra, krait, and saltwater snake, are especially numerous in India, and pythons and crocodiles are also found. Tropical birds of India include the parrot, peacock, kingfisher, and heron. The rivers and coastal waters of India teem with fish, including many edible varieties.

The following are the principal types of natural vegetation in India: (1) Tropical Evergreen Rain Forests, (2) Deciduous or Monsoon Type of Forests, (3) Dry Deciduous Forests and Scrubs, (4) Semi- Desert and Desert Vegetations, (5) Tidal or Mangrove Forests and (6) Mountain Forests.

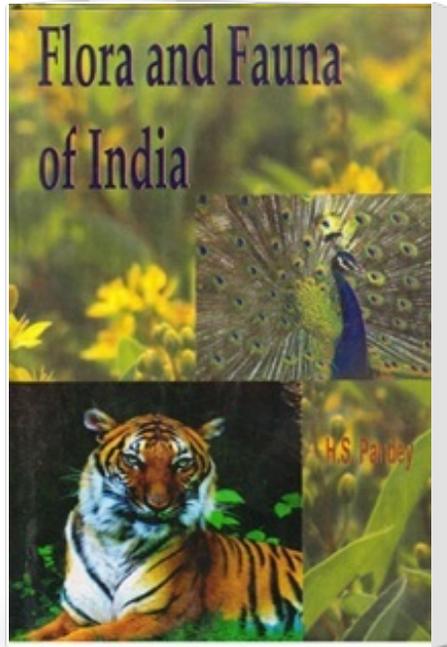
TROPICAL EVERGREEN RAIN FORESTS

These forests grow in areas where rainfall is more than 200 cm. They are mainly found on the slopes of the Western Ghats and the Northeastern regions of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, the Tarai areas of the Himalayas and the Andaman groups of Islands. The trees in these belts have dense growth. Important varieties of trees are sishu, chap lash, rosewood, mahogany, bamboos, garjan and sandalwood.

DECIDUOUS OR MONSOON TYPE OF FORESTS

These forests are found in areas where the rainfall is between 100 cm and 200 cm. These forests grow on the lower slope of the Himalayas, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh,

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