'Vermin' politics: Human-wildlife conflict mitigation needs to be based on science

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The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021

- The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021 brings in a **major change by reducing the number of schedules from six to four.**
- It proposes to **remove Schedule V completely**.
- It gives the Centre **direct power to declare** any species to be '**vermin**' and make way for them to be freely hunted.

The Wild Life (Protection) Act

- The WLPA, 1972 currently has **six schedules** that assign varying degrees of **protection to animals and plants.**
- **Under Schedule I and II of the Act**, animals, and birds such as tigers and elephants are offered the highest protection.
- **Schedule V lists species classified as 'vermin',** such as common crows, fruit bats, rats, and mice.
    - They may be **hunted freely**.
- Though the **act does not define the word 'vermin',** WLPA's 62nd section grants the central government the power to declare any wild animal, **other than those specified in Schedule I and Schedule II as 'vermin' for any area and a specified period.**
- To prevent human-wildlife conflicts, **several states in the past have petitioned** to **declare various animals to be 'vermin'**, including elephants, Indian porcupine, bonnet macaque, common langur, and barking deer.
    - In 2016, the Centre declared **rhesus monkeys** in Himachal Pradesh, **wild boar** in

Uttarakhand, and **Nilgai** in Bihar to be 'vermin'.

Vermin

- They are **pests or nuisance** animals that **spread diseases or destroy crops** or livestock.
- It is used to refer to a wide scope of organisms, including **rodents, cockroaches, termites, bed bugs, ferrets, stoats, sables, rats, and occasionally foxes.**
- It is **defined in relation to human activities**, which species are included vary by region and enterprise.