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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Putting Science and Community Into Species Protection

DOWN TO EARTH

28 June 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · GS3

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Putting Science and Community Into Species Protection

Down to Earth 28 June 2026 **GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A species can be saved by a notification in Delhi or by the village that lives beside it. Should conservation decisions flow down from a central authority, or up from the communities who actually share the landscape?"

Source: [Original editorial](#) [Down to Earth](#)

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** has issued a **Standard Operating Procedure** to notify **threatened species** under **Section 38 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/biological-diversity-act/>), creating a uniform process built on science, consultation and traditional knowledge. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **biodiversity conservation, statutory** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/statutory/>) **frameworks and community-based environmental governance**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

The NBA's new procedure ends ad hoc listing of **threatened species** with a uniform, transparent process under **Section 38**, integrating science, field data and **traditional knowledge**. So far 159 plant and 173 animal species are notified. It is welcome, but it works only if it empowers gram-sabha-level **Biodiversity Management Committees** and shares benefits, rather than centralising power in the NBA.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Section 38, BD Act	Power to notify species near extinction	Statutory basis for listing and protection
NBA SOP	Uniform listing procedure	Ends ad hoc, inconsistent designation
Traditional knowledge	Community ecological knowledge	Listings reflect ground reality
Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC)	Local body at gram-sabha level	Devolved, participatory conservation

THE ANALYSIS

- 1 From ad hoc to systematic.** The SOP gives states and union territories a common scientific framework, scientific assessment, consultation, validation and conservation planning, replacing inconsistent, case-by-case listing.
- 2 Science plus the ground.** Crucially, the procedure asks for field assessments and traditional knowledge alongside laboratory and satellite data, so a species' real status is captured.
- 3 Listing must lead to action.** Section 38 ties notification to rehabilitation (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/rehabilitation/>) and conservation. A list that does not trigger a financed plan is merely a label.
- 4 The centralisation risk.** Indian conservation tends to route power upward. If the SOP sidelines BMCs and reduces communities to a consultation formality, it betrays the participatory design of the Biological Diversity Act itself.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Biological Diversity Act, 2002, Section 38 (*notification of threatened species in consultation with the State Government*); **2023 Amendment; Biological Diversity Regulations, 2025.** **The bodies:** National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), Chennai; State Biodiversity Boards; gram-sabha-level Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs); People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). **The data:** 159 plant and 173 animal species notified across 17 states and 3 union territories. **Concepts:** Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS); IUCN Red List criteria; in-situ versus ex-situ conservation (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/ex-situ-conservation/>).

THE DEBATE

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Argument for the procedure: A uniform, science-based SOP ends arbitrary listing, brings transparency and stakeholder consultation, and ties notification to conservation planning, finally giving India a credible, repeatable way to designate and protect species at risk.

Argument against: Top-down SOPs tend to centralise power in the NBA and state boards, treat traditional knowledge as a tick-box, and leave under-funded BMCs out of real decisions, repeating the gap between participatory law and centralised practice.

Balanced verdict: The procedure is a genuine advance, but its value depends on **devolution** (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/devolution/>). Empower BMCs with decisions and resources, codify traditional knowledge with consent and benefit-sharing, and finance each listing's conservation plan. Otherwise the SOP adds a scientific veneer to old centralisation.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A well-drafted procedure can still fail if the bodies meant to implement it are starved of power and money. When assessing any governance reform, look past the document to the institution: who decides, who is funded, who is merely consulted. Implementation capacity, not text, decides outcomes.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Species at risk -> NBA SOP (science + field data + traditional knowledge) -> Section 38 notification -> IF empowered BMCs + benefit-sharing + financed plan -> real protection
 || IF centralised + tick-box consultation -> a label without a rescue

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Devolve** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/devolve/>) **to BMCs**. Give Biodiversity Management Committees genuine decision rights, funds and a role in monitoring listed species.
- ② **Codify** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/codify/>) **traditional knowledge fairly**. Record community knowledge with free, prior and informed consent and access-and-benefit-sharing, not as unpaid data.
- ③ **Fund People's Biodiversity Registers**. PBRs are the evidence base; they must be financed and updated, not left dormant.
- ④ **Finance every listing**. Tie each notification to a budgeted rehabilitation and conservation plan so protection follows the label.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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Statutory listing of threatened species protects biodiversity only if it empowers local institutions and uses traditional knowledge, not if it centralises decisions.

“Systematising species protection is welcome, but a list is not a rescue.”

Section 38, Biological Diversity Act, 2002; NBA; State Biodiversity Boards; BMCs; People’s Biodiversity Registers; 159 plant and 173 animal species notified; Biological Diversity Regulations, 2025.

Should conservation knowledge held by communities be treated as a public good, a tradeable resource, or a right requiring consent and reward?

UPSC has asked on the Biological Diversity Act, ABS and community conservation; this connects them to a live procedural reform.

Forest Rights Act, IUCN Red List, Nagoya Protocol (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/nagoya-protocol/>), decentralised environmental governance.

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>), *Prokerala* (<https://www.prokerala.com>)

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KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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The National Biodiversity Authority's procedure to notify threatened species under Section 38 of the Biological Diversity Act is a welcome move to systematise conservation, but it will work only if it genuinely empowers Biodiversity Management Committees and integrates traditional knowledge rather than centralising decisions.

 **SUPPORTING**

- A uniform, transparent SOP ends ad hoc listing and gives states and union territories a common scientific framework for identifying species at risk.
- Integrating field assessments and traditional knowledge ensures listings reflect ground reality, not just laboratory or satellite data.
- Section 38 links notification to rehabilitation and conservation, so listing becomes the start of protection, not merely a label.

 **COUNTER**

Critics warn that a top-down SOP can centralise authority in the NBA and state boards, sideline gram-sabha-level Biodiversity Management Committees, and reduce community knowledge to a consultation formality without real power or benefit-sharing.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Devolve genuine decision-making and resources to Biodiversity Management Committees, codify traditional knowledge with consent and benefit-sharing, fund People's Biodiversity Registers, and tie each listing to a financed conservation plan.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"Statutory listing of threatened species will protect biodiversity only if it empowers local institutions and integrates traditional knowledge." Examine in light of the NBA's procedure under the Biological Diversity Act. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

A threatened species can be saved by a notification signed in Delhi or by the village that shares its forest. The NBA's new procedure must decide which logic it serves: top-down listing, or bottom-up stewardship made statutory.

BODY

Section 38 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 empowers the Central Government, in consultation with the State Government, to notify species on the verge of extinction as threatened, regulating their collection and providing for rehabilitation. The NBA's new Standard Operating Procedure to operationalise this is a genuine advance.

It replaces ad hoc listing with a uniform, transparent process built on scientific assessment, stakeholder consultation, validation and conservation planning, and it explicitly calls for integrating credible scientific data, field assessments and traditional knowledge while involving local communities. So far, 159 plant and 173 animal species have been notified across 17 states and three union territories.

The promise is real, but so is the risk. Indian conservation has a long habit of centralising authority while reducing communities to consultees.

The Biological Diversity Act's own architecture, gram-sabha-level Biodiversity Management Committees and People's Biodiversity Registers, was meant to make conservation participatory, yet these bodies remain under-funded and under-empowered. An SOP that routes power upward to the NBA and state boards, treating traditional knowledge as a tick-box, would repeat that error.

The deeper test is institutional: does the procedure devolve decisions and resources to those who live beside the species, with consent and benefit-sharing, or does it merely add a scientific veneer to centralised control? Listing must be the start of financed, community-led protection, not a label.

CONCLUSION

Systematising species protection is welcome, but a list is not a rescue. The procedure will be judged by whether it puts both science and the community at the centre of conservation, or only the rubber stamp.


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