

## Kerala Assembly passes wildlife protection, forest amendment bills

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PUBLISHED: OCTOBER 09, 2025 10:45 AM IST

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Kerala Legislative Assembly. Photo: Manorama

Thiruvanthapuram: The Kerala Legislative Assembly on Wednesday passed the Kerala Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Bill and the Kerala Forest (Amendment) Bill, marking two key legislative moves in the state's forestry policy.

The Wildlife Protection Amendment Bill empowers the Chief Wildlife Warden to order the shooting or tranquilisation of wild animals that attack humans or stray into human settlements and public spaces. The amendment, which modifies provisions of the Central Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, requires the President of India's assent before it becomes law.

The Opposition, which boycotted the Assembly proceedings in protest over the gold-plating scandal at Sabarimala, did not participate in the discussions on these bills. Forest Minister AK Saseendran criticised the Opposition's decision to stay away, urging all parties to remain united in seeking Presidential assent for the Bills.

"The Opposition is attempting to gain political mileage by inciting resentment among farmers in the high ranges," the Minister said. He added that under the Forest Amendment Bill, the designation of Watcher will be changed to Forest Beat Assistant. However, the personnel holding this title will not have the authority to make arrests.

Minister Roshy Augustine, speaking on the Bill, accused the Opposition of trying to 'create a smokescreen through misleading statements.'

The Forest Amendment Bill permits farmers to cut down sandalwood trees on their private properties, provided they obtain prior consent from the Forest Department. Once felled, the department will sell the trees, and the proceeds from the sale will be handed over to the landowners.

### **Key provisions of Wildlife Protection Amendment bill**

- Wildlife that strays outside forests or protected areas may be treated as a 'threat to human life'.
- The Chief Wildlife Warden can issue orders to shoot or tranquilise animals straying into human habitats based on reports from the District Collector or the Chief Forest Conservation Authority.
- If the population of any wild species increases abnormally in a specific area, measures such as birth control or relocation can be undertaken to manage their numbers.