

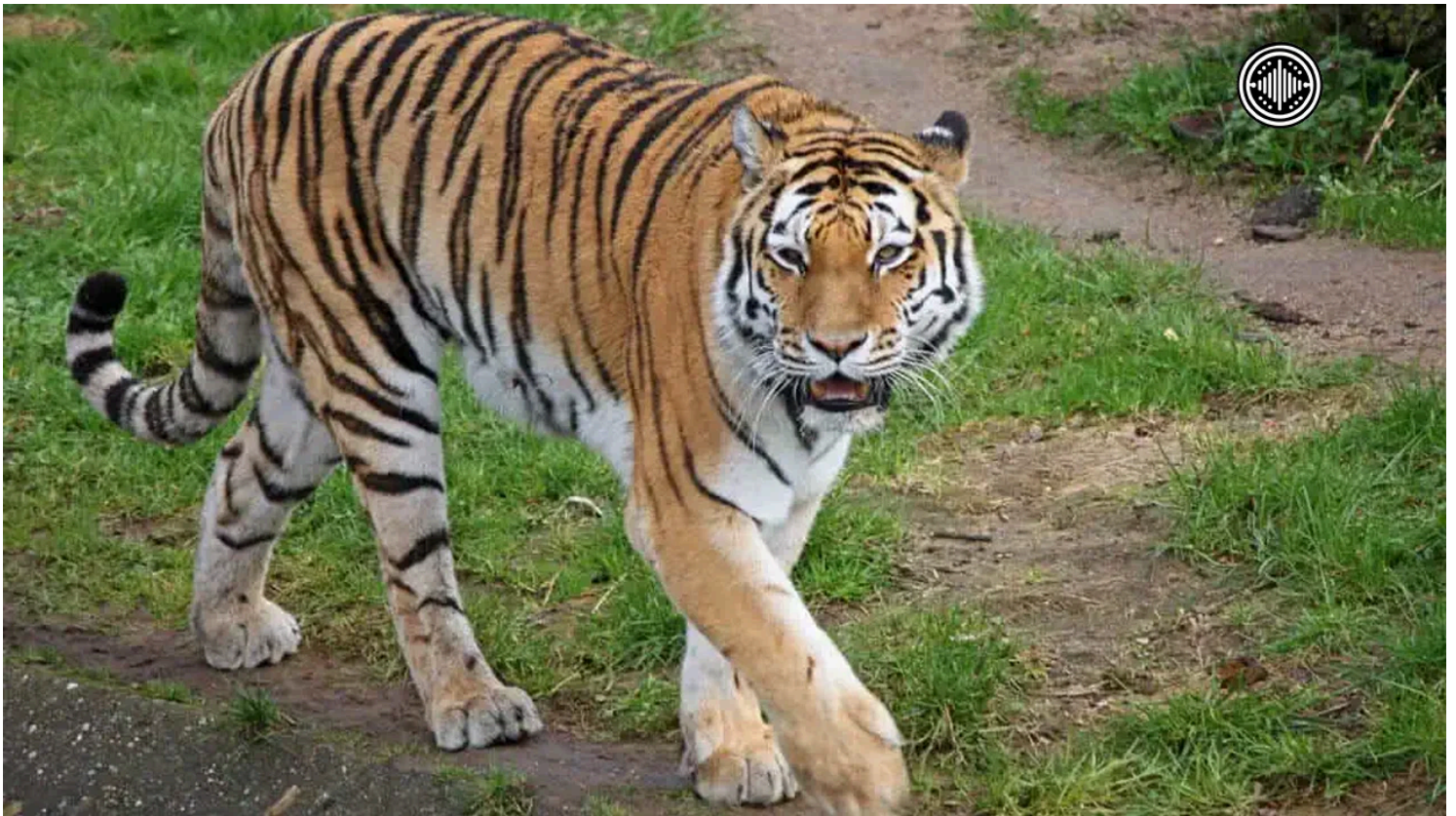
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Punjab Wildlife Crackdown Sparks Debate Among Bird Keepers

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The Punjab Wildlife Department has intensified its efforts to curb the illegal trade of wild animals and the private keeping of exotic birds and animals. While these moves aim to protect endangered species, they have caused concern among hobbyist bird owners.

Recent raids have led to the recovery of 25 lions and tigers, alongside several rare birds and animals, from districts including Lahore. However, some citizens argue that the crackdown unfairly targets those who have legally kept birds as a hobby for years.

Rao Abdur Rehman, a resident of Model Town, has been keeping partridges for 15 years. Though his license has not been renewed recently, he insists his care for the birds is genuine. “I care more for these birds than my own children. But now even they are at risk,” Rehman said.

Another local, Shehzad Hussain, questioned the ban on keeping birds when the department continues issuing hunting licenses. “Licenses for black partridges have not been renewed since 2007. The government should focus on commercial breeders, not hobbyists,” he said.

Wildlife law expert Altamash Saeed stressed that protected animals should not be privately owned under any circumstances. “Hunting policies need review, especially since hunting licenses are sometimes issued during breeding seasons,” he added.

The Wildlife Department acknowledges it lacks accurate records of privately kept wild animals and birds due to previous manual licensing systems. A new digital system is being introduced to improve transparency and data accuracy.

According to Assistant Chief Wildlife Ranger Asim Bilal, certain animals, including lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, and various deer species listed under Schedule-II of the Wildlife Act, cannot be kept in residential areas.

“Breeding farms must be established outside populated zones and require departmental approval. Exotic birds like macaws do not need licenses for home keeping, but breeding or trading them requires a dealer’s license. Birds such as peacocks, pheasants, and chakors require licenses. New rules also require registration and tagging of species like raw parrots, ring-necked parrots, and Alexandrine parrots, with a registration fee of Rs1000,” Bilal explained.

Licensing for hawks, shikras, and falcons has mostly been discontinued, except hawks, for which licenses remain available. Monkeys and pythons are fully protected and cannot be privately kept. Hunting wild quails requires permission, while private keeping is illegal.

While the crackdown reflects positive steps towards wildlife conservation, concerns remain among hobbyists facing legal challenges. Enhancing transparency and accessibility in laws and licensing will help balance protection efforts with citizens’ interests.