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## Guardianship, Stewardship, and Wildlife Conservation in Islamic Teachings

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## ***Guardianship, Stewardship, and Wildlife Conservation in Islamic Teachings***

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### ***Abstract***

This study investigates the ethical viewpoints on wildlife and endangered animals within the context of Islamic teachings. The notion of guardianship and stewardship, as described in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, emphasises people's obligation to care for and safeguard the natural environment, especially animals. The Islamic perspective of environmental ethics is based on the ideals of justice, compassion, and responsible stewardship. This research looks at the teachings and scriptures that highlight the importance, interdependence, and conservation of animals. It also discusses the need of safeguarding endangered species as a vital component of responsible stewardship. This research study intends to provide light on the ethical grounds that underlie conservation activities within Islamic teachings by evaluating pertinent Qur'ānic passages and Ḥadīth.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Wildlife, Conservation, Stewardship, Animal welfare.*

### **Introduction**

The conservation of animals and endangered species is a key priority in today's conservation efforts. Various religious and cultural traditions offer ethical perspectives on animal care and human responsibilities to the natural world (Ottuh and Idjakpo 2021). Teachings from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth provide guidance on environmental ethics in the Islamic religion, emphasising the virtues of stewardship, guardianship, and conservation (Sanjotis 2012).

In Islam, animals are seen as crucial components of God's creation, deserving of respect, compassion, and responsible treatment (Kula 2001). The sacred book of Islam, the Qur'ān, has sections that emphasise the interconnectedness of humanity and environment, emphasising humans' ethical responsibilities as caretakers and trustees of the Earth (Muhamad, Syihab, and Ibrahim 2020). "There is not an animal that lives on the land, nor a being that soars on its wings, but forms part of communities like you," the Qur'ān says.<sup>1</sup> This verse emphasises the equal worth and interdependence of all living species, as well as the significance of treating animals with love and respect.

In addition to the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth, which comprises of Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) sayings and acts, plays an important role in developing ethical principles for Muslims. The Ḥadīth highlights humanity's obligation to care for and safeguard the natural environment. According to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), "The world is green and lovely, and Allah has entrusted it to you as custodians. He observes how you interact with it "

(Er 2021). This Ḥadīth emphasises humanity's position as stewards charged with the care and preservation of the Earth.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate ethical ideas on wildlife and endangered species in the context of Islamic teachings. This research tries to give insight on the ethical grounds that underlie conservation activities within the Islamic religion by studying pertinent Qur'ānic texts and Ḥadīth. Understanding these ethical concepts can help to design tactics and ways that promote responsible stewardship, wildlife conservation, and the preservation of endangered species in accordance with Islamic beliefs. This study adds to the larger conversation on ethical considerations in animal conservation and species preservation by investigating the intersection of Islamic teachings and environmental conservation.

## Animal Welfare in Islam

### 1. The Status of Animals in Islam:

Animals have intrinsic worth and importance in Islam since they are part of God's creation. "And the earth We have stretched out (like a carpet); established thereon mountains strong and immovable; and generated therein all kinds of things in appropriate proportion," Allah states in the Qur'ān.<sup>2</sup> This stanza emphasises the diversity and balance of creation, emphasising the role of animals in sustaining the Earth's ecological equilibrium. Furthermore, in a Ḥadīth, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) observed, "Whoever is good to God's creatures is kind to himself".<sup>3</sup> This Ḥadīth highlights the interdependence of humans and animals, stating that treating animals with respect and compassion benefits mankind in the long run.

#### 1.1 Animals as Creations of God

The Islamic faith regards animals as a vital component of God's creation, placing a high emphasis on their value and well-being. The intrinsic worth of animals and their role in the divine order are emphasised in Islamic teachings drawn from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. "There is no creature on the ground or bird that flies with its wings except that they are communities like you," the Qur'ān says.<sup>4</sup> This stanza emphasises the idea of animals as unique groups that coexist with humans and need respect and compassion. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) Ḥadīth highlights the necessity of compassion and kindness toward animals. "Whoever is good to God's creatures is kind to himself," he said.<sup>5</sup> This Ḥadīth emphasises the interdependence of human acts and animal care, emphasising the duty to be kind and compassionate. Animal ethics and responsible stewardship are viewed as fundamental parts of faith in light of these Islamic teachings, encouraging the preservation and care of animals as part of God's creation.

#### 1.2 Animals as Divine Gifts and Signs

Animals hold a significant place in religious and spiritual traditions as divine signs and blessings, signifying the wisdom and benevolence of the divine creator (Renard 1996). Animals are viewed as physical manifestations of God's might, wisdom, and kindness in the Islamic religion (Wersal 1995). The function of animals as signs and blessings is mentioned in the Qur'ān, urging believers to ponder on their presence and the teachings they provide.

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ مُّثَالُكُمْ.<sup>6</sup>

And there is no creature on [or within] the ground or bird that flies with its wings save [that they are] communities like you.

The parallel existence of animals and people as communities is emphasised in this passage,

emphasising the interdependence of all things and the divine genius behind their diversity. Animals are also seen as favours and sources of nutrition. The Qur'an states:

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ سَكَنًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ جُلُودِ الْأَنْعَامِ بُيُوتًا تَسْتَخِفُّونَهَا يَوْمَ ظَعْنِكُمْ وَيَوْمَ إِقَامَتِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَصْوَابِهَا وَأَوْبَارِهَا وَأَشْعَارِهَا أَنْتُمْ وَمَتَعُ إِلَى حِينٍ-<sup>7</sup>

And Allah has made for you from your homes a place of rest and made for you from the hides of the animals' tents which you find light on your day of travel and your day of encampment.

This verse highlights the provision and benefits derived from animals, such as their skins for shelter and protection during travel. In Islamic tradition, animals are seen as living symbols of God's grace, mercy, and sustenance, inspiring believers to recognize and appreciate the divine blessings inherent in their existence.

## 2 Compassion and Animal Welfare

Islam emphasises animal love and gentleness (Masri 2016). "There is not an animal (that lives) on the land, nor a creature that soars on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you," the Qur'an says.<sup>8</sup> This lyric emphasises the shared existence and community of all living species, highlighting the importance of empathy and compassion for animals. Animals were treated with care by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), who banned inflicting them needless pain or suffering. In a Ḥadīth, he exhorted his followers to display charity and gentleness.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ؛ فَإِذَا قَتَلْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الْقِتْلَةَ، وَإِذَا ذَبَحْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الذَّبْحَةَ، وَلْيُجِدْ أَعْدَاكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ، وَلْيُرْجَمَ مَا يَدْبِجُ-<sup>9</sup>

"Allah, indeed, has decreed perfection in all things. So, when you murder, kill with care, and when you slaughter, slaughter with care. Allow every one of you to sharpen your blades and allow him to spare the anguish of the animal he slaughters.

### 2.1 Kindness and Mercy towards Animals

The encouragement of animal kindness and mercy is a key value established in many religious and ethical traditions. Compassion and charity for animals are viewed as acts of virtue in the Islamic religion and are frequently stressed in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth. "And there is no creature on earth except that Allah is its supply, and He knows its place of abode and location of storing," the Qur'an says.<sup>10</sup> This poem represents the heavenly care and concern for all things, highlighting their inherent worth and humans' obligation to treat them with love. In the Ḥadīth, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) emphasised the need of giving charity to animals.

اتقوا الله في هذه الدواب الصامته واقتاتوها في الوقت المناسب، وأطلقوها حين تكون متعبة-<sup>11</sup>

Fear Allah in these silent creatures, and ride them while they are fit, and let them go free when they are tired," he urged.

This Ḥadīth emphasises the ethical treatment of animals, emphasising careful handling and concern for their physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, Islamic tradition stresses the notion of stewardship, in which people are viewed as caretakers tasked with caring for all creation, including animals (Tlili 2012). The principles of Islam encourage Muslims to be compassionate, to avoid inflicting injury or suffering, and to provide basic requirements for animals (Naderi et al. 2012). Incorporating these concepts into daily life produces an atmosphere of love and sympathy toward animals, which aligns with Islamic teachings' ethical obligations.

### 3 Prohibition of Cruelty and Abuse

Animal cruelty and mistreatment are categorically condemned in Islam.

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ مَوَصَّاءُكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ.<sup>12</sup>

And do not destroy the soul, which Allah has prohibited, unless by justice," the Qur'an urges believers.

This passage forbids the wrongful killing of any life, including animal lives. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) stressed the prohibition of inflicting damage to animals and banned animal cruelty for any reason. He mentioned in a Ḥadīth, "A lady was once chastised because she had imprisoned a cat till it died. Because of that, she was sent into Hellfire".<sup>13</sup> This Ḥadīth emphasises the seriousness of mistreating animals and the significance of treating them with care and respect. Similarly, killing animals has been strongly discouraged in Ḥadīth:

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ: قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: "مَنْ قَتَلَ عُصْفُورًا أَوْ حَبُوبًا فَلَا يُؤْذِيهِ وَلَا يَزِمِيهِ إِلَّا فِي الْخَطَرَاتِ، لِإِنَّهُ يُدْخِلُهُ فِيهَا، أَوْ فَجَاءَ بِحَتَا جُهُ، فَلْيَنْفِقْ عَلَيْهِ"، قَالُوا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَفِي الشَّهَوَاتِ؟ قَالَ: "لَا، إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ لِمَا كَلِهَ".<sup>14</sup>

Narrated by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment." The listeners asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what is a just cause?" He replied, "That he will kill it to eat, not simply to chop off its head and then throw it away.

#### 3.1 Restrictions of Animal Fighting and Abuse

The prohibition of animal fighting and maltreatment is a significant component of several religious and cultural traditions' ethical and moral precepts (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014). Mistreatment and cruelty to animals are strongly prohibited in Islam, reflecting the emphasis on compassion and justice (Islam and Islam 2015). The necessity of treating animals with love and respect is emphasised in Islamic teachings drawn from the Qur'an and Ḥadīth. "There is not an animal that lives on the land, nor a being that soars on its wings, but forms part of communities like you," the Qur'an says.<sup>15</sup> This verse emphasises people and animals' joint existence as communities, highlighting their equal entitlement to dignity and well-being. Furthermore, the Ḥadīth of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) expressly forbids animal cruelty.

دَخَلَتِ النَّارَ امْرَأَةٌ، بِسَبَبِ قِطْطَةٍ أَمْسَكْتَهَا فَلَمْ تُطْعِمَهَا وَلَمْ تَدَعْهَا تَأْكُلْ مِنْ حَشَاشِ الْأَرْضِ.<sup>16</sup>

"A woman entered the (Hell) Fire because of a cat that she had tethered, neither feeding it nor releasing it to eat from the vermin of the soil," he said.

This Ḥadīth provides as a sharp warning of the seriousness of animal cruelty and the penalties that may result. Islamic teachings emphasise the notion of responsible stewardship, with an emphasis on animal preservation and care. Acts such as animal fighting, cruelty, and abuse are deemed incompatible with the principles of compassion and justice upheld by the Islamic faith. Individuals may contribute to a society that values the dignity and well-being of animals by recognising the relevance of these principles and applying them in their everyday lives.

#### 3.2 Prohibition of Overloading and Overworking Animals

Overloading and overworking animals is a basic concept of animal welfare and ethical treatment from a variety of cultural and religious views. Islamic teachings emanating from

the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth highlight the significance of caring for and protecting animals. In the Ḥadīth, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) highlighted the ban of overworking animals. He advised:

لَا تُكَلِّفُوا الدَّوَابَّ فَوْقَ طَاقَتِهَا. <sup>17</sup>

Do not overload the animals beyond what they can handle.

This Ḥadīth emphasises humans' ethical obligation to avoid exposing animals to excessive effort or stress. Regarding the importance of treating animals with care our Prophet (ﷺ) said:

اركبوها وهي سليمة وأرخوها وهي متعبة، فإنما أعطيتم رزقكم منها. <sup>18</sup>

"Ride them while they are healthy and let them rest when they are tired, for certainly Allah has granted you provisions from them until you reach your destination.

Islamic teachings encourage the principle of balance and moderation in relationships with animals in order to ensure their wellbeing and avoid undue harm. Individuals can display compassion and regard for the well-being of animals by adhering to the prohibition against overloading and overworking animals, which aligns with the concepts of justice and stewardship emphasised in Islamic teachings.

#### 4 Wildlife Conservation and Preservation

Islam promotes the protection and conservation of species and their habitats (Ansari, Jamal, and Oseni 2012). Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) acknowledged the importance of animal conservation and outlawed hunting for sport or waste. He remarked in a Ḥadīth:

مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَغْرِسُ غَرْسًا أَوْ يَزْرَعُ زَرْعًا فَيَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ طَيْرٌ أَوْ إِنْسَانٌ أَوْ بَيْهَمَةٌ إِلَّا كَانَتْ لَهُ صَدَقَةٌ. <sup>19</sup>

There is no Muslim who plants a tree or sows a seed and subsequently a bird, a human, or an animal eats from it unless it is charity for him.

This Ḥadīth promotes environmental care and nurture, particularly the preservation of wildlife.

##### 4.1 Wildlife Guardianship and Stewardship

The notion of wildlife guardianship and care is important in environmental ethics and conservation initiatives. The ideals of guardianship and stewardship in Islam are based on the belief that humanity have been entrusted with the obligation of caring for and conserving the natural environment, especially animals (Gada 2014). The Qur'ān says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيُبْلِغَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ  
وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ <sup>20</sup>

And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has exalted some of you above others in degrees [of rank] so He may trial you via what He has given you.

This verse emphasises the idea of people being Earth's heirs or trustees, with the need to serve as wildlife caretakers and stewards. It recognises the diversity of persons in terms of ranks and degrees, which acts as a test from Allah. It reminds believers that Allah is speedy in punishing those who abuse their positions, yet He is also compassionate and kind. It emphasises humans' need to fulfil their position as Earth's guardians and to use the benefits and supplies bestowed upon them in a decent and just manner. Through his teachings, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) highlighted the necessity

of this obligation even more. He remarked:

مَنْ قَتَلَ عُصْفُورًا أَوْ أَكْبَرَ مِنْهُ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ فَإِنَّهُ سَيُؤَاخَذُ بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ<sup>21</sup>

Whoever kills a sparrow or anything larger than that without a valid cause will be held responsible on the Day of Judgment.

This Ḥadīth emphasises the need of preserving and safeguarding animals, emphasising individuals' responsibilities for their acts toward the natural world. Individuals may help to the protection and well-being of animals by adopting the values of guardianship and stewardship, recognising their intrinsic value and the interdependence of all living species.

#### 4.2 Conservation of Endangered Species

The conservation of endangered species is a critical component of global conservation efforts. The necessity of protecting and maintaining the natural environment, particularly endangered species, is emphasised in Islamic teachings. The notion of animal conservation and protection coincides with Islamic concepts of justice, compassion, and responsible stewardship. "And there is no creature on [or within] the ground or bird that flies with its wings save [that they are] communities like you," the Qur'ān says.<sup>22</sup> This passage emphasises the worth and significance of all creatures in the divine order, emphasising the necessity to defend and sustain their existence. Furthermore, via his teachings, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) highlighted the need of conservation. He stated,

إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ خَضِرَاءٌ مُسْتَدَانَةٌ، وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مَا فَيَنْظُرُ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ<sup>23</sup>

The planet is green and lovely, and Allah has entrusted it to you as custodians. He observes how you interact with it.

This Ḥadīth highlights the responsibilities handed to people as Earth stewards to care for and maintain the natural environment, particularly endangered species. Individuals can respect the ideals of justice and responsible stewardship by recognising the need of safeguarding endangered species and undertaking conservation measures, so contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystems.

#### 5 Islamic Conservation Principles

Conservation ideas anchored in Islamic beliefs and ethics have emerged as an important framework for long-term environmental care. Islam, being a complete faith, has a holistic approach to conservation, stressing environmental protection and preservation (Ashtankar 2016). The Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and academic interpretations of Islamic jurists throughout history serve as the foundation for Islamic conservation ideals (Gulzar et al. 2021). The notion of "Khalifa,"<sup>24</sup> which emphasises people' responsibilities as custodians and trustees of the Earth, is one of Islam's foundational doctrines.

مَنْ غَرَسَ شَجَرَةً فَأَكَلَ مِنْ ثَمَرِهَا، أَوْ زَرَعَ حَقْلًا فَأَكَلَ مِنْهُ رَجُلٌ أَوْ دَابَّةٌ، فَإِنَّهَا صَدَقَةٌ لَهُ". قَالَ النَّبِيُّ مُحَمَّدٌ ﷺ،  
حَسَبَ ابْنُ عُمَرَ.<sup>25</sup>

Whoever plants a tree and it yields fruit, whoever cultivates land or plants a field from which people or animals feed, it is charity for him," the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) remarked, according to Abdullah bin Umar.

This Ḥadīth emphasises the need of protecting and nurturing the environment for the benefit of all living things. Furthermore, Islamic beliefs encourage resource conservation by prohibiting waste and excessive consumption.

"كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا؛ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ."<sup>26</sup>

Eat and drink, but waste not by excess, because Allah despises the wasters.

Islamic conservation beliefs also highlight the notion of natural balance and harmony, encouraging humanity to maintain ecological balance and avoid harming the environment. Incorporating these ideas into current conservation efforts can provide a beneficial foundation for tackling environmental issues and fostering sustainable development.

### Conclusion

Finally, Islamic teachings highlight the values of stewardship, conservation, and guardianship as key components of ethical responsibility toward animals and endangered species. The interdependence of people and animals is emphasised throughout the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, underlining the value and dignity of all living beings. Islam's ethical principles instruct believers to treat animals with love, respect, and compassion. These lessons emphasise appropriate wildlife care and conservation, as well as the preservation of endangered species. Individuals who embrace these ideas may contribute to the well-being and conservation of the natural environment while also aligning their activities with Islamic teachings.

### Recommendations

It is encouraged to incorporate these ethical ideas into practical measures for wildlife conservation and the preservation of endangered species based on the concepts of guardianship, stewardship, and conservation found in Islamic teachings. This may be accomplished by implementing the following suggestions:

- 1. Education and Public Awareness:** Encourage educational programmes within Islamic communities that highlight Islam's ethical precepts on wildlife and endangered animals. Raise awareness of the interdependence between humans and the natural environment, highlighting the need to care for and conserve animals.
- 2. Ethical Principles:** Develop and distribute ethical guidelines for individuals and organisations active in wildlife conservation and management that incorporate Islamic teachings on compassion, justice, and responsible stewardship. Encourage conservation efforts to follow these criteria in all respects.
- 3. Cooperation:** Encourage collaborations between Islamic groups, conservation organisations, and academic institutions to establish cooperative projects and programmes addressing animal conservation from an Islamic perspective. This can involve things like research, conservation efforts, and community participation.
- 4. Encouragement:** Encourage sustainable activities that have the least harmful impact on wildlife and their habitats. Encourage responsible tourism, sustainable agriculture, and resource management techniques that adhere to Islamic environmental ethics standards.
- 5. Community Engagement:** Involve local communities, religious leaders, and researchers in animal conservation conversations and projects. Encourage the incorporation of environmental ethics into sermons, religious instruction, and community events in order to foster a culture of responsible stewardship and guardianship.

It is reasonable to promote a stronger awareness and appreciation of the ethical obligations towards wildlife and endangered species within Islamic communities by applying these ideas. This holistic approach can contribute to the conservation and protection of wildlife, creating a harmonious relationship between humans, animals, and the natural world in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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- 22 Al-Qur'ān 6:38.
- 23 Muslim, **Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim**, Ḥadīth No. 116.
- 24 Al-Qur'ān 2:30.
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- 26 Al-Qur'ān 7:31.