Background : The Indian Circus Federation challenged a government notification that prohibited the training and exhibition of bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and lions in performances.

What the Supreme Court decided: On 1 May 2001, the Supreme Court upheld the government's notification. It recognised that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act allowed restrictions on the exhibition and training of animals where these activities caused unnecessary pain or suffering.
indiankanoon.org+1

Why this judgment matters: It strengthened legal protection for animals used in entertainment and performances. It recognised that entertainment cannot be a justification for subjecting animals to unnecessary suffering.

2. Protection and conservation of wildlife

3. Centre for Environmental Law, WWF-India v. Union of India (2013)

Important wildlife conservation judgment

Background: The Asiatic lion population in India was concentrated in the Gir Forest of Gujarat. Conservationists raised concerns that depending on a single natural habitat could put the species at risk from disease, natural disasters and other threats.

The proposal was to establish a second natural habitat for Asiatic lions at Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.

What the Supreme Court decided: On 15 April 2013, the Supreme Court directed that steps be taken for the reintroduction of Asiatic lions into Kuno, following scientific guidelines and with the involvement of wildlife experts.

The Court emphasised that wildlife conservation must be guided by ecological considerations and the long-term survival of species.
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Why this judgment matters: It recognised that protecting an endangered species requires more than preventing hunting. It also requires habitat protection, scientific conservation and planning for the future survival of wildlife.

3. Protection of cattle and livestock

4. State of Gujarat v. Mirzapur Moti Kureshi Kassab Jamat (2005)

Background: The case concerned a Gujarat law that prohibited the slaughter of bulls and bullocks, including animals that had ceased to be useful for agricultural work or breeding.

The law was challenged by groups representing the interests of the butchers' trade.

What the Supreme Court decided: On 26 October 2005, a seven-judge Constitution Bench, by majority, upheld the Gujarat amendment imposing the wider prohibition.

The Court considered the constitutional principles relating to the preservation of livestock, agriculture and the State's responsibility under Article 48.

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Why this judgment matters: It is an important judgment on the constitutional protection of cattle and the relationship between animal preservation, agriculture and public interest.

Legal note: This case primarily concerned the constitutional validity of cattle-preservation legislation. It should not be presented as a general ruling that all forms of animal slaughter are prohibited throughout India.

4. Constitutional provisions supporting animal welfare

The following constitutional provisions are particularly important when discussing animal protection in India.

Provision What it says in simple terms

Article 48 The State should organise agriculture and animal husbandry along modern and scientific lines and take steps to preserve and improve breeds of cattle.

Article 48A The State must protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.

Article 51A(g) Every citizen has a fundamental duty to protect the natural environment and show compassion towards living creatures.

The responsibility of citizens

Animal welfare is not only the responsibility of courts and government authorities. Citizens can contribute by:

- Reporting instances of animal cruelty to the appropriate authorities.
- Supporting responsible animal rescue and rehabilitation.
- Never abandoning domestic animals.
- Avoiding activities that involve cruelty or exploitation of animals.
- Protecting natural habitats and wildlife.
- Encouraging compassion towards animals among children and communities.

Conclusion

The development of animal welfare jurisprudence in India reflects an important change in how the law approaches animals. Courts have increasingly recognised that animals must be protected from unnecessary suffering and that wildlife conservation is essential for ecological balance.

However, judgments alone cannot guarantee protection. Their true value lies in their implementation and in the everyday choices made by citizens.

A society's compassion is reflected not only in how it treats other human beings, but also in how it treats the animals that share its world.