

Wildlife Institute of India

Chandrabani, Dehradun

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Dated: 08.08.2023

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Sub.: Implementation of the WII Guideline for Academic Ethics -reg.

The institute has finalized the guideline document for Academic Ethical practices. The policy document has been prepared and it has been decided that the same will be implemented strictly at WII. The policy document is attached herewith as **Annexure I**.

As approved, the same will be implemented from August 2023 onwards at the institute.

Signed by

Virendra Rambahal Tiwari

Date: 08-08-2023 17:35:01

(Virendra Tiwari)

Director

Guidelines on Academic Ethics



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

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July 2023

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is one of the country's premier training and research institute in the field of wildlife science and conservation. The institute was set up in 1982 with a mandate to train government and non-government personnel, carry out research, and advise on matters of conservation and management of wildlife resources. WII's research projects are being conducted in field sites across the length and breadth of the country and are the primary sources of scientific information to help conservation. They are also the means of keeping the institute's faculty abreast of current field situations and the latest technology. WII has also benefitted greatly from various international and bilateral collaborations for institutional building, faculty development, infusion of modern technology and creation of a scientific infrastructure. With many countries in south and south-east Asia region regularly sending their personnel to its training programmes, WII is already considered an important regional centre for training and education in wildlife management and conservation.

Aims and objectives of the institute are:

- Build up scientific knowledge on wildlife resources.
- Train personnel at various levels for conservation and management of wildlife.
- Carry out research relevant to management including the development of techniques appropriate to Indian conditions.
- Provide information and advice on specific wildlife management problems.
- Collaborate with international organizations on wildlife research, management and training.
- Develop as a regional centre of international importance on wildlife and natural resource conservation.

1. Preamble

The major activities of WII can be broadly classified into education, research and capacity building in biodiversity conservation. WII has given a new direction to the concept and practice of biodiversity conservation, made it more practical and realistic by seeking the involvement and cooperation of local people. However, the problem and challenges are immense and diverse in a constantly changing scenario. Learning from its own and others experiences, WII traverses a path of hope which will help strengthen its inputs and find answers to conservation issues and problems in the developing world.

Wildlife research is a major activity of the Institute that not only supports field conservation but also enables its faculty to keep abreast with technological advances and contemporary field situations. The Training, Research and Advisory Council (TRAC) guide WII's research

agendas and initiatives. The Institute's research program aims to improve our understanding of biological, ecological, socio-economic and management aspects of protected areas, multiple use/buffer zones and threatened species. The Institute undertakes research relevant to wildlife ecology, landscape level planning, conservation of species and habitats, wildlife forensics, conservation genetics and genomics, human dimensions of conservation and community participation, coastal and marine biodiversity, and environmental impact assessment. WII makes extensive use of modern tools and techniques in its research programmes. WII research contributes significantly towards the development of baseline information, ecological relationships, and strategies relevant to management, mitigation and monitoring. Research outcomes are disseminated in the form of national and international peer reviewed articles, books, Ph.D. theses, dissertations, research/technical reports, field manuals, etc.

The faculty and the researcher community are actively involved in executing diverse activities including the conduct of research, publication of articles, training and mentoring, administration of science and interfacing with the public and press. Given the institute is adhering to implementation of national level policies in the wildlife and conservation sector, it is important to remember that the best scientific atmosphere requires awareness, sensitivity and careful adherence to ethical norms.

Wildlife Institute of India as an institute expects all its members to follow the highest standards of academic ethics. This document attempts to point out various types of necessary and desirable academic practices, and also highlights several types of practice that are not acceptable globally. It should be taken as a general guideline towards dealing with alleged cases of ethical misconduct with suggestions regarding remedial actions to be taken by the authorities whenever such misconduct may have occurred. document is not exhaustive and could undergo revisions in the future, depending on the requirements of the institute. Academic ethics, also known as academic integrity, refers to the moral principles and values that guide the conduct of the individuals. These principles are essential for upholding the integrity, honesty, and fairness of the system.

2. Conduct of Research

Research at the Institute is conducted either individually, or within formal/informal collaborations on specific projects. In a wide variety of research projects, some combination of faculty members, researchers, laboratory staff and/or external collaborators may be involved.

All individuals participating in a given project are responsible for their own actions and should make sure these are consistent with high ethical standards.

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator/s

Every research project has usually one or few Principal Investigator/s, along with a set of co-PIs who implement the project. The PIs are also expected to play a leading role in ensuring ethical standards. They should closely and regularly monitor the experimental procedures used, ensure data recording and storage activities, and compiling results in the form of publications and reports. It is necessary that these rules and policies are made aware to all the participants in the research project by the PIs. The PI should also ensure careful supervision and appropriate mentoring of young researchers. In the case of informal collaborations all members involved are expected to play an appropriate role to ensure that ethical standards are upheld. At the beginning of the project (in case of informal collaborations) clear communication through email/meeting minutes etc. help in reducing any future problem/conflict of interests/discrepancies.

Responsibilities of the researchers

Researchers are accountable to society, their professions, the institutes where the research is taking place, the staff and students involved and, in particular, to the sponsor that is funding the research. Researchers should be honest in respect of their own actions in research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. This applies to the whole range of research work, including designing experiments, generating and analysing data, applying for funding, publishing results, and when peer reviewing the work of other researchers.

Following are some of the important aspects of academic/research ethics that require careful attention from the PIs:

a) Research permissions and ethical committee approvals

WII faculty and researcher community works on extremely varied aspects of wildlife science where often they are required to generate data from various taxa listed under the schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. It is therefore mandatory to ensure that appropriate research permits are obtained in advance from relevant agencies (State Forest Departments, MoEF&CC and Institute's Animal Ethics Committee). Non-compliance of this aspect of research can lead to malign of reputation and long-term denial of permits to the WII research community. PhD fellows, MSc Students, Affiliates and Researchers working in various projects should not seek to obtain research

permission without the knowledge of their faculty/PI. Permits and permissions from the Govt come with specific guidelines and ToR. It is the responsibility of Both PI and Researchers to follow the same while collecting data and writing research papers and reports.

b) Data collection

While conducting research, whether independently or jointly, it is necessary to ensure that data collected (including raw data) are reliable, properly recorded and dated, and carefully stored. Fabrication and falsification of data, even data that may be perceived to be of relatively lower importance to the research outcome, clearly constitute scientific misconduct. The procedure followed should be described in sufficient detail to permit independent verification. Selective use of data without scientifically valid reasons is unacceptable and not encouraged by the institute.

c) Sharing of facilities

The institute hosts a large number of facilities and cells in the campus with specific functions. There should be a fair and transparent policy regarding use of these facilities. Every faculty and student at the Institute shall have equal right on common facilities of the WII. However, they need to take necessary approvals through their respective guides to use certain specific laboratory/other facilities. The precise sharing protocol would depend on the details of the situation. In case of WII, every cell should have an approved Terms of Reference available to the entire community, which should be adhered strictly. Any deviations or conflict of interest need to be resolved immediately by the competent authority.

d) Experiments involving animals or humans

WII research involves a large numbers of animal handling, capture, radio-collaring etc. along with data generation for socio-economic studies. Most of these activities require permissions from appropriate authorities. Guidelines and protocols announced by the various national agencies for experiments involving humans or animals should be scrupulously followed at the institute. WII is already bound by a number of Government of India regulations with regard to research activities. In case of handling of animals, advance approval from the institute's Animal Ethics Committee is advised. It is important to remember that collection of Sociological data involving human subjects are also under purview of ethical clearances and necessary approvals are absolute must.

All faculties must ensure that research and ethical permits are obtained for their respective projects in advance.

e) Data management

In both independent and collaborative research, every effort is required to ensure that data are collected, cured and stored with complete honesty. False statements and/or deliberate distortions are unacceptable. Fabrication, falsification or improper manipulation of data are highly unethical and should be acted upon with immediate priority to safeguard institute's reputation. While the procedures for recording and storing data vary from project to project, but a standard policy should be followed. It is important to remember that all data generated from WII projects are institute's property and it is the PIs responsibility to manage the data for any kind of audits in future. Researchers should be made aware (by the PI) that it is not uncommon for the correctness of a research publication to be questioned, even after publication. It is recommended that research related data, lab notebooks and material be stored in a secure manner so that if required the scientific validity of the data can be examined. Generating, recording and publishing false data are fraudulent practices and must be banned. If anyone found to be following any such practises strict actions need to be taken against them.

Most of the PhDs at WII are outcomes from the research projects. There should be formal approval from the PI of the project to use project data/part of the data for PhD thesis. For any other use, other than PhD, the students need to have formal approval from the PI of the project.

f) Publications

i. Publication policy:

- The person with overall responsibility for the research programme should authorise publication of results as corresponding author, and should be responsible for the entire process. Should any problem is found regarding the publication the corresponding author should be the sole responsible person to address all queries related to the content of the paper (integrity of results, adequacy of internal peer review, research permission, appropriate protection of intellectual property rights, appropriate authorship).
- All funding sources must be acknowledged in any publication or publicity.

- Authors must acknowledge research permitting authorities citing the specific permission letter number and date.
- Authors must not publish the same paper in different journals.
- If an error is found that degrades the worth of published findings, the corresponding author must immediately discuss the matter with the research group, with a view to notifying co-authors and publishing a correction as soon as possible setting out the basis of the reservations.
- Where the findings are found to be in serious doubt, a retraction should be published speedily.

ii. Authorship:

The authorship of scientific publications is a very critical issue. All listed authors of a publication should have contributed significantly to it. It is inappropriate to offer “guest authorship” to anyone who has not made any significant contribution. Likewise, it is wrong to exclude from authorship anyone who deserves to be an author. It is unethical to include anyone as an author of a paper without their clear consent. The PIs should have a clear and open discussion with all the members of the research team to decide the order of the authorship (based on contributions). It is the duty of the corresponding author to communicate with all the co-authors before final submission of any manuscript with a reasonable timeline and get comments/consents from them. In this way, any future problems related to the publication can be avoided using the chain of communications.

Every faculty at Wildlife Institute of India is expert in specific areas of research. It is the responsibility of the PI of the project to ensure that all the others investigators involved in any project have specific roles. This is required to maintain higher standards of research at WII.

iii. Plagiarism:

The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as “the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own”. In the context of scientific research, it can involve unattributed copying of textual material or research results. Though the degree of severity can vary, plagiarism always amounts to ethical misconduct and requires redressal. The use of someone else’s work is not by itself unethical. A limited amount of textual material can be copied if it is clearly marked as a quote (typically by enclosing it within quotation marks) and the source is

explicitly cited where the quote starts or ends. Alternatively, text may be paraphrased with a general indication of where the concepts originated.

With regard to copying text from other sources, it can be easily tackled by using appropriate programs like iThenticate (available at institute's library). For all thesis, it is mandatory to provide a plagiarism certificate. The PIs should advise the researchers to use these facilities in the institute and avoid any plagiarism issues during publication.

g) Conflict of interest

Conflicts of interest can occur at every stage of the research endeavour – from planning the research to disseminating and exploiting the results – and in many forms. Apart from financial interests, conflicts might, for example, be personal, academic, or political. There is nothing inherently unethical in finding oneself in a position of conflict of interest; what is required is to recognise the fact and deal with it accordingly. Researchers must pay as much attention to perceived and potential conflicts of interest as to actual conflicts. How one is perceived to act influences the attitudes and actions of others, and the credibility of scientific research overall. In all such cases it is essential for all the members involved to promptly disclose foreseeable conflicts of interest. This is particularly important for selection committee or other such committees, where such conflict of interest need to be reported to the relevant competent authority.

3. Reporting and redressal mechanism of misconducts

Any suspected ethical misconduct at WII must be reported to the 'WII Academic Ethics Committee' with a copy to the Director. Complaints can be made by anyone, not necessarily an Institute member, but it has to be communicated with full name and address of the complainant along with relevant documentations (if possible) in order for the committee to be able to decide whether there is a *prima facie* case. The complainant should not give wide publicity to the complaint at this stage. Such publicity, if it occurs, can be treated as ethical misconduct even if the complaint is found to have merit and continues to be investigated. There will be no reprisal for complaints made in all sincerity and good faith, even if they later turn out to be unfounded. However, complaints that turn out upon investigation to have been falsely made with deliberate intent to malign the accused will be treated as a serious form of ethical misconduct.

The Academic Ethics Committee will investigate the complaints carefully and with due discretion. At the end of the investigation, the committee will submit a written report to the Director indicating the extent to which merit has, or has not, been found in the complaint, and suggesting remedial action if any is required. The Committee will not publicise the report at this stage. If required, the committee may also consult a broad-based Advisory Committee on ethical issues with approval from the Director. If any complaint comes against any member of the committee itself then the member has to remove him/herself from the investigation.

At this stage, if appropriate, the Director may, in consultation with the Ethics Committee, explore the possibility of an amicable solution through mediation. If this is successful the complainant will modify or withdraw the complaint in writing. However, the complainant should not be coerced to accept mediation. The final verdict on the case, including any redressal required, will take the form of a written statement by the Director communicated to the complainant, the subjects of the complaint and the Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee report may be attached to this statement, if relevant. The investigation of the Ethics committee should be completed within three months of time. However, in more complex cases, it can go up to six months period.

In case the harassment is considered to be of a sexual nature, the complaint has to be registered with the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), who will then take appropriate action.

4. Appellate authority

Any person aggrieved by the Report-cum-Findings and the consequential action taken by the Academic Ethics Committee may file a First Appeal before the Director, WII.

5. Constitution of The WII Ethics Committee

Following will be the constitution of the WII Ethics Committee:

- 1) Dean, FWS (Chairperson)
- 2) Research Coordinator
- 3) Registrar
- 4) Faculty member (nominated by Director, WII for a 2 year tenure)
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