



ANIL AGARWAL
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The Big Stories

Down To Earth



New Frontiers of Conflict

- In November 2025, the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department captured **913 blackbucks and nilgai**.
- It carried out a first-of-its-kind exercise to herd and relocate a **large antelope population** to Rani Durgavati Tiger Reserve, Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary, and Kuno National Park.
- **Farm raiding** is a growing concern, compounded by **extreme weather events**.
- Species causing **40-80% crop losses** include **macaques, langurs, blackbuck, chinkara, gaur, deer, nilgai, sambar, wild boars, giant squirrels, porcupines, elephants, peacocks, and parakeets**.
- Persistent damage has led to the **abandonment of high-value crops** in several affected regions.



Shift in Behaviour

- **Primary surveys** conducted with **1,200 farmers in Maharashtra**.
- Nearly **Rs 100 crore paid annually** as **compensation** for wildlife-related losses.
- Animal behaviour is **changing**.
- **Loss of instinctive fear of humans** observed.
- Noticeable changes in **activity patterns and routines**.



Ecological Niche

- **Jorbeer Conservation Reserve**, on the outskirts of **Bikaner**, was once a **regulated animal carcass disposal site** spread over **56 sq km**.
- **Steady food availability** attracted **scavengers**, especially **vultures**.
- In **2008**, the **Rajasthan government** notified it as a **Conservation Reserve** to support **declining vulture populations**.
- Over time, Jorbeer became a **major vulture-feeding and birdwatching site**, hosting **native and migratory raptors**.
- Today, the **ecological balance has shifted** — nearly **1,000 stray dogs** dominate the site, often **chasing vultures away from carcasses**.



Vulture Decline and the Rise of Dogs

- Starting in the mid-1990s, vulture populations plummeted by **nearly 98% due to diclofenac use.**
- This decline triggered a **trophic cascade** phenomenon, altering the scavenger ecosystem.
- Loss of vultures created a vacant scavenging niche that was rapidly filled by free-ranging dogs feeding on carcasses.
- **Dogs now actively disrupt vulture feeding** by harassing and chasing them away.
- This interference can reduce the time vultures spend feeding by up to 30%, affecting their survival and recovery.



A New Conservation Challenge

- Dogs have evolved as the **dominant predator**, turning a **conservation success** into a **new management challenge**.
- In landscapes such as the **Thar Desert**, they **hunt in packs** and have been recorded attacking **80 wild species**.
- Affected wildlife includes **chinkara, nilgai**, and vulnerable birds like the **Sarus crane**.
- Dogs are also **hybridising with mesopredators** such as wolves, posing risks to **wolf populations** and **genetic integrity**.
- The **Supreme Court** has taken cognisance of the **stray dog issue**.
- Stray dogs have also emerged as an **election issue in Telangana**.



Human-Tiger Conflict

- In May, 45-year-old Sanjeevani Maikalwar was **mauled by a tiger** while collecting firewood in Chiroli village, Chandrapur (Maharashtra).
- **Chandrapur** has reported **22 tiger-related deaths since January 2025**, with **11 attacks in just 17 days in May**.
- There is a **significant rise in human-tiger conflict** across India, including **Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand**.
- **Tiger occupancy** in India has expanded by **30%**, covering nearly **138,200 sq km** over two decades, pushing some **reserves towards saturation**.
- In hotspots like **Chandrapur**, **tiger density** has reached **10–15 per sq km** (above the national average of eight), forcing tigers into **agricultural lands and village fringes**.



Shared Landscapes

- **Tigers share space with people at high densities in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, and Karnataka.**
- **Nearly 45% of tiger-occupied areas overlap with 60 million people, often in economically prosperous regions.**
- **Conservationists warn that tigers may be losing their natural fear of humans due to constant interaction and “unscientific” interventions.**
- **In Ranthambore, the practice of offering live prey to injured tigers may have led cubs to associate humans with food, contributing to fatal attacks.**



Crop-Raiding Elephants and Lifestyle Diseases

- In **July 2023**, forest officials captured a **40-year-old male elephant** in **Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)** and **translocated** it to **Valparai forest, Western Ghats**.
- The **tuskless elephant** weighed **6,000 kg**, far above the **4,500–5,000 kg average** for his age.
- **Crop-raiding elephants** are becoming **obese** due to a **sedentary lifestyle** and consumption of **nutrient-rich crops**.
- Unlike wild elephants that **forage 16–18 hours daily**, crop-raiders may feed for only **3–4 hours** and remain inactive for the rest of the day.
- Shortages of **native food sources** (mango, jackfruit, bamboo, wild berries) have pushed elephants to consume **invasive species** like *Lantana camara* and water hyacinth, or raid farms for **paddy, sugarcane, and bananas**.



Food Scarcity + Invasive Species = Elephant Conflict

- In **human-dominated landscapes**, elephants are feeding at **waste disposal sites**, becoming habituated to **processed foods and salt**, leading to **behavioural changes**.
- Forest officials say a **lack of forest food in Idukki** has triggered frequent incursions. Notorious “raider” elephants like **Arikomban** and **Chakkakompan** targeted **paddy shops and fruit trees**, resulting in **dangerous encounters** and eventual **translocations**.
- The shortage of natural food is largely driven by **invasive alien plants**. Kerala Forest Minister **AK Saseendran** told *Down To Earth* that nearly **45% of forests** are choked by **alien species**.
- In **Kerala**, the **elephant population declined by over 40%** between **2017 and 2023**, dropping to **1,920 individuals**.



Invasive Plants and Human-Wildlife Conflict

- **Emerging ecological crisis:** Invasive plant species now occupy **66% of India's natural systems**, causing **severe wildlife food shortages** and intensifying **human-animal conflict**.
- **Eleven high-priority invasive species** are of major concern, especially in **fragmented and deciduous forests**.
- In **Bandipur Tiger Reserve**, invasive species dominate **nearly 75% of forest areas**.
- Invasive alien plants have spread across **15,500 sq km** of India's natural landscapes.
- **Urgent need for a national policy** to address invasive species management.



Thank you