Human-Wildlife Conflicts: Animals, Humans & the question of ‘And’ & ‘Or’

Ravi Chellam ravi.chellam@strandlf.org
Chief Executive Officer, Metastring Foundation

Anil Agarwal Dialogue 2019: Annual Media Conclave

12th February 2019
India’s Conservation Achievements

• Very commendable but a mixed record
• Species: Charismatic vs not so charismatic
• Habitats: Tall and moist forests vs the Rest
• Ecosystem functions, Habitat contiguity & quality, Geographical scale, Time scale
• Inclusion of local communities
• Application of science both in management and in monitoring
• Lack of transparency
India’s Conservation Achievements

• Focus more on the fate of individual animals and population growth, rather than on taking a habitat-based long-term view
• Human costs of conservation – Relocation
• Following the law
• Ethical framework
• Development and then conservation
• We can do better
Introduction

• Conflicts - Not all are easy to recognise
• Attitudes, mind set
• Fear, constraints in activities
• Physical conflict (crop damage, livestock predation, property damage, human injuries and death)
• Constraints in access to wildlife habitats
• Nature of relationship between local communities and management authorities
Introduction

• Conflict is not new: State policies; acute due to complete lack of local agency
• Tolerance, acceptance, co-existence
• Species – lions, leopards, tigers, snow leopards, elephants, wild pigs, nilgai, blackbuck, peafowl, parakeets, monkeys, crocodile, snakes.....
• Impact of urban lifestyles, climate change and more distant events on the local ecology and the resulting drivers of conflict.
Introduction

• Mitigation
• Removal of the animal - Driving the animals
• Capture and relocation – Lethal options
• Physical barriers - Impacts
• Compensation payments
• Insurance schemes
• Behaviour – People and animals
• Proactive policies and partnerships
• 1978-91 – 193 attacks 14.8/year – 28 people died 2.2/year (14.5% of the attacks)
• 1987-88 very severe drought
• Pre-drought 7.3 attacks/yr 0.8 deaths/yr
• Post drought 40 attacks/yr 6.7 deaths/yr
• 7 of the 20 corpses were fed on by lions
• High seasonality recorded in two (1988 & 89) of the three years of this problem – monsoon
• 82% of the attacks outside PA
• 50% < 9.5 km
• 75% < 18.5 km
• 95% < 32 km
• 100% <73 km Median 9.7 km
• Pre-drought spatial distribution of attacks was random
• Post-drought clustered in areas with greater PA and non-PA edge
• Closer to former lion baiting sites
• These two factors independently contributed to the observed spatial pattern
Spatial pattern of lion attacks-pre-drought
Spatial pattern of lion attacks-post-drought
Roads upgraded/planned for upgradation in protected areas of Karnataka
• Lots of people (~200 / sq km)
  • Lots of leopards (11 adults and 4 cubs identified in about 100 sq km)
Town animals
Translocated animals - Ajoba
Take home messages

• India has done well in conservation
• Significant role of tolerance of local communities and cultural practices which revere nature
• Conflict has always existed
• Probably increased due to habitat degradation, fragmentation and loss
• Increasing local wildlife populations
Take home messages

• Significant presence of wildlife populations outside PAs and in human dominated habitats
• Changes in landuse as well livestock rearing practices
• Most importantly state’s efforts to isolate and exclude local communities from conservation
• Decreasing tolerance and adoption of more direct actions – Threats to co-existence