

## Wildlife and Human Conflict – Current Scenario

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### ABSTRACT

As human populations expand and natural habitats shrink, people and animals are increasingly coming into conflict over living space and food.

From baboons in Namibia attacking young cattle, to greater one-horned rhinos in Nepal destroying crops, to orangutans in oil palm plantations, to European bears and wolves killing livestock – the problem is universal, affects rich and poor, and is bad news for all concerned.

The impacts are often huge.

People lose their crops, livestock, property, and sometimes their lives. The animals, many of which are already threatened or endangered, are often killed in retaliation or to 'prevent' future conflicts.

Human-wildlife conflict is occurring more and more, affecting many different species. The effects of climate change will probably exacerbate the problem

The Amur leopard is particularly vulnerable in the Russian Far East, where farmers raise captive deer for human consumption and to produce antlers for the Asian medicine market. Deer are the natural prey preference for leopards, and in absence of wild prey, leopards venture into the deer farms in search of food. Owners of these farms are quick to protect their investment by eliminating leopards attacking their stock. Presently, the Amur leopard's most immediate threat comes from such retaliatory or preventive killing.

Bears throughout Europe (as elsewhere) are sometimes known to attack livestock and water pipes, raid orchards, attack rubbish bins and on occasion storehouses of food. People are naturally scared of these large predators and the first reaction is to attack or shoot them.

However, attacks on humans do not appear to be a result of predatory behaviour, but rather a result of the bear defending itself, its cubs or a carcass against humans. A wounded bear poses the biggest threat.

In Austria, teams of bear specialists sometimes capture and move a problem bear to a new area or work to condition the bear not to attack or dwell near human settlements.

WWF and its partners are working in many parts of Western Europe and Scandinavia to reintroduce bears, wolves, lynx, and bearded vultures, and to increase the populations of these species.

### INTRODUCTION

Reintroducing species is not always popular but many measures have been used to reduce conflict between the animals and humans including:

- Monitoring lynx numbers in Switzerland, and translocating animals once they have reached a maximum number in a particular area.
- Working with farmers to protect livestock and property from large carnivores. For example, training of Abruzzo mastiffs (a large dog breed) in Italy to protect sheep against wolf attacks.
- Working with farmers in Sweden to minimize encounters with brown bears and wolves.
- Compensation schemes for the Sami in Sweden for reindeer taken by wolves.

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- Education to gain public support for the presence of large carnivores.

Small farmers - often desperately poor and already economically and nutritionally vulnerable, forced by circumstances to encroach into elephant habitat - can lose their entire livelihood overnight from an elephant raid.

Large agriculture is also affected. In the largest palm oil producing province in Indonesia, Riau, losses due to elephant damage of oil palm plantations and timber estates are estimated to be around US\$105 million per year.

People are also often injured and killed. In India, over 100 people are killed by elephants each year, and over 200 people have been killed in Kenya over the last 7 years.

Elephants are often killed in retaliation. Wildlife authorities in Kenya shoot between 50 and 120 problem elephants each year and dozens of elephants are poisoned each year in oil palm plantations in Indonesia.

Over the last 100 years, African elephant populations have declined from 3-5 million to 470,000-690,000 and Asian elephant populations have declined from 100,000 to between 35,000 and 50,000. Habitat loss and conflict with people are among the biggest threats to their continued survival.

For the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), WWF and partners in the region, are exploring ways to reduce conflict. The strategies include looking at alternative enclosures for livestock, infrared cameras to monitor and record the behavior of jaguars, and the implementation of a compensation scheme for jaguar attacks on livestock.

## DISCUSSION

Reducing bear mortalities induced by human conflicts is the main challenge for this species. Named after its unique facial markings across its brow, spectacled bears (*Tremarctos ornatus*) can measure up to 2m from head to tail and weigh between 140–175kg. They're found throughout the Andes Mountains of Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia. Due to habitat loss, they have been known to search for 'greener pastures', particularly fertile agricultural lands, in search of a quick feed.

There are a range of solutions from growing different crops that bears don't like, to moving problem bears to different areas and developing policy tools and protocols for managing human/bear conflict. Global biodiversity is being lost much faster than natural extinction due to changes in land use, unsustainable use of natural resources, invasive alien species, climate change and pollution among others.

Land conversion by humans, resulting in natural habitat loss, is most evident in tropical forests and is less intensive in temperate, boreal and arctic regions. Pollution from atmospheric nitrogen deposition is most severe in northern temperate areas close to urban centres; and the introduction of damaging alien species is usually brought about through patterns of human activity.

Species loss is also compounded by:

- the ongoing growth of human populations and unsustainable consumer lifestyles
- increasing production of waste and pollutants
- urban development
- international conflict.

Humanity's well-being and prosperity – indeed, our very existence – depends on healthy ecosystems and the services they supply: clean water, a liveable climate, food, fuel and fertile soils. The challenge of providing everyone with the food, water and energy they need is already a daunting prospect, and the human population is projected to swell to over 9 billion by 2050.

Protecting nature and using its resources responsibly are prerequisites for human development and well-being, and for building resilient, healthy communities.

We are specifically focusing on 5 priority footprint areas that we believe need addressing most urgently:

- **Carbon, Energy & Climate** (energy use, impact of forest loss, and the need for a new global policy on climate change)
- **Sustainable cities** (transition of cities for sustainable development)
- **Farming** (food, fibre, grazing, aquaculture, and biofuels)
- **Fishing** (over-fishing, illegal & unregulated fishing, bycatch, poor management and procurement)
- **Forestry** (timber, paper, pulp, and fuel wood)
- **Water** (dams, irrigation, and drinking supplies)

To reduce humanity's footprint in these areas, we are developing and implementing new ways of growing crops, managing fisheries, forests and wetlands, generating energy, and dealing with waste.

We are also looking at ways to transform markets: where and how companies and their supply chains obtain and process these vital commodities.

The aim is that everyone lives within the Earth's capacity to sustain people and nature, and has equitable access to, and use of, natural resources.

Wildlife trade is by no means always a problem and most wildlife trade is legal. However, it has the potential to be very damaging. Populations of species on earth declined by an average 40% between 1970 and 2000 - and the second-biggest direct threat to species survival, after habitat destruction, is wildlife trade.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most obvious problem associated with wildlife trade is that **it can cause overexploitation** to the point where the survival of a species hangs in the balance. Historically, such overexploitation has caused extinctions or severely threatened species and, as human populations have expanded, demand for wildlife has only increased.

Recent overexploitation of wildlife for trade has affected countless species. This has been well-publicized in the cases of tigers, rhinoceroses, elephants and others, but many other species are affected.

WWF provides technical and scientific advice to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). WWF and TRAFFIC carry out cutting-edge research on illegal wildlife trade routes, the effects of wildlife trade on particular species, and on deficiencies in wildlife trade laws — information which is essential for CITES members to keep abreast of new trends and react accordingly. This research is used to create new plans for dealing with the illegal wildlife trade and also helps WWF and TRAFFIC promote the inclusion of new species in the CITES appendices or resolutions.



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