Respect the Rights of
All Creations

Mathew Koshy

Respecting the rights of all living beings is fundamental to coexistence and environmental harmony. Every creature has a habitat where it finds security and sustenance. However, human-wildlife conflicts are escalating at an alarming rate.

Wild animals do not attack humans unless they feel threatened, or their habitat is encroached upon. When this happens, they react instinctively to defend their rights. If they cannot repel the intruder directly, they find other ways to protest—sometimes with devastating consequences.

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The Rising Cases of Human-Wildlife Conflict

Human-wildlife encounters are increasing, leading to tragic losses of lives, livestock, and crops. Elephants, leopards, and tigers have caused significant destruction to farmland, leaving many farmers in distress. Losing a year's yield due to wildlife encroachment can be economically crippling. Frustrated communities now demand government action, calling for solutions such as forest boundary walls, electric fences, trench barriers, and regular patrolling by forest officials. While such measures offer temporary relief, they fail to address the root cause — human expansion into wildlife territory.

Wisdom from Indigenous Communities

For centuries, tribal communities have lived in harmony with wildlife, respecting the natural rhythm of forests and avoiding unnecessary conflicts. A tragic incident in 2004 illustrates this wisdom. In Valparai, India, an elephant attacked a Kadar tribesman—the first recorded elephant attack on their community. The Kadar people, known for their deep understanding of wildlife, rarely experience such conflicts. Three Kadar tribal members had travelled to Valparai to sell honey. They returned to their settlement by auto-rickshaw around 9 p.m. After disembarking, they had to walk about 800 meters to reach their homes. The driver warned them about the presence of an elephant nearby. As they walked, an elephant standing near a jackfruit tree suddenly charged at them. Since it was drizzling, visibility was low. Though they

initially managed to escape, one person returned to collect groceries he had dropped while fleeing. Tragically, the elephant attacked him, and he died on the spot. Night travel in the forest is dangerous, and ignoring the driver's warning proved fatal.

This incident underscores a critical lesson: forests have rules, and those who respect them remain safe.

Key Causes of Human-Wildlife Conflict and Solutions

1. Farming Along Forest Boundaries

Growing crops near forests attracts wildlife, particularly elephants searching for food. Cultivate non-palatable crops like tea, bay leaves, and lemons instead of maise and rice. Introduce beekeeping, as elephants naturally avoid bees.

Example – Nepal's Bahundangi Model (2015):

In 2015, the Nepalese government, with support from the World Bank, built an 18-km electric fence to protect Bahundangi. However, elephants quickly adapted, knocking down the wires with their tusks. Conservationists realised that fences alone would not solve the problem. Instead, a long-term coexistence strategy was needed. The turning point came when farmers switched from growing maize and rice—staple crops attractive to elephants—to alternative crops like tea, bay leaves, and lemons. Initially sceptical, farmers later embraced the transition after witnessing economic benefits. Beekeeping was another successful initiative, as elephants naturally avoid bees. By planting mustard to attract bees, farmers gained an additional income source while protecting their crops. **Bahundangi successfully transitioned from conflict to coexistence through adaptive farming, community participation, and a shift in**

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attitudes.

2. Increasing Human Presence in Forests

People now venture deeper into forests, disrupting wildlife. Several forest reserves worldwide have successfully reduced human-wildlife conflict by restricting entry:

• Periyar Tiger Reserve, India: Human-elephant and human-tiger conflicts have been mitigated through strict protection measures, regulated eco-tourism, and anti-poaching patrols.

• Chitwan National Park, Nepal: Human-tiger and human-rhino conflicts have been minimised by restricting access and actively engaging indigenous Tharu communities in conservation efforts.

• Udzungwa Mountains, Tanzania: Human-elephant and human-leopard conflicts have been managed through core area restrictions, buffer zone fencing, and community-based programs.

• Gir National Park, India: Human-lion conflicts have been reduced through habitat protection initiatives and the relocation of Maldhari communities.

• Khao Yai National Park, Thailand: Road closures, restricted wildlife corridors, and early warning systems help prevent human-elephant

conflicts.

• Danum Valley, Malaysia: Human-orangutan and human-clouded leopard conflicts have been avoided **by limiting access exclusively to research activities.**

3. Disrupting the Natural Rhythm of Forests

Human behaviour often disturbs wildlife. Drunken individuals fail to sense danger and provoke animal attacks. Loud music or headphones prevent people from detecting wildlife cues. **Awareness campaigns must educate people about respecting the natural rhythm of forests.**

4. Destroying Wildlife Corridors

Elephants and other animals follow migration routes for survival. When roads, resorts, and settlements block these pathways, conflict intensifies. Governments must dismantle illegal resorts built on wildlife corridors.

Munnar, Kerala, India (2019): The Kerala High Court ordered the demolition of 100+ illegal resorts and the restoration of elephant corridors.

Jim Corbett National Park, India (2023): The National Green Tribunal (NGT) closed down resorts along the Kosi River, reclaiming tiger territory.

Governments must stop political interference that allows wildlife habitat destruction.

5. Wildlife Protesting for Their Rights

When natural habitats shrink, animals react. Elephants raid crops, tigers enter villages, and leopards hunt livestock. **Policies must recognise wildlife rights and ensure their habitats remain protected and undisturbed.**

Moving Towards Coexistence

Human-wildlife conflict is not just about animals—it reflects environmental imbalance.

Instead of killing wildlife or building fences, we need sustainable coexistence strategies. God created everything in this universe with an intrinsic value and purpose; all are interconnected. Economists estimate the value of forests based on their timber value. Forests are ecosystems with inherent value and are interlinked.

Community Conservation

Maasai warriors in Kenya became elephant guardians, tracking herds instead of hunting them. Karen people in Thailand shifted from using elephants for logging to community-run ecotourism. Botswana's beehive fences deter elephants from farmlands without harming them.

A Fascinating Historical Lesson

A true story from Rupal, Nepal, highlights the unintended consequences of human intervention. In the 20th century, a female tiger terrorised a village. The locals drove her away, forcing her to cross into Kumaon, India, where she continued her attacks. Eventually, Jim Corbett was called in to hunt her down. But what happened next was unexpected. With the tiger gone, Nilgai (blue bulls) overran the region, destroying crops. Desperate, villagers begged the government to bring back a tiger to restore balance. **This story underscores a powerful truth: Nature self-regulates, and human interference often worsens the problem**.

Sustainable Solutions for the Future

To foster harmony, we must promote community-based conservation (locals as protectors of wildlife), use non-lethal deterrents (e.g., beehive fences, chili-based repellents), strengthen wildlife corridors (safe migration paths), and balance local livelihoods with conservation efforts.

Conclusion

The rising human-wildlife conflict reflects a disruption of nature's rhythm. Wildlife is not the enemy — we must learn to coexist. By embracing Indigenous wisdom, scientific research, and ethical conservation, we can restore balance and create a harmonious world where all creatures thrive. Nature dances to a divine rhythm — when we disrupt it, chaos follows. Let's respect this rhythm and move together in the cosmic dance of life. ●

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