

VIEWS AND EXPRESSIONS

SUGGESTIONS TO LESSEN THE MAN ANIMAL CONFLICT

The man-animal conflict is one of the burning issues of the country today. Different wild animals are having dissimilar problems with humans. Every other region is experiencing a different issue related to the same wild animal and man.

The major issue is the killing of domestic animals by wild carnivores. Man from centuries has been considering domestic animals his property and source of income, and if they are hurt or killed by wild carnivores, man rages and aims to destroy the marauders.

But, in the bygone days, carnivores killed lots of domestic animals, which are not so swift. Olden day naturalists divided carnivores, especially tiger and panther, in three categories, Cattle Lifter, Game Killer and Man Eater. The cattle lifters were bulky and lethargic whereas the game killers were lean and swift and lived in deep forests where domestic animals could not be encountered.

In the late 1800s, the human population of the country was sparse. Vast jungles existed with plenty of ungulates. The book *The Royal Tiger of Bengal - His Life & Death* by J. Fayrer published in 1875 mentions that Captain B. Rogers of the Indian army, who studied the habits of Indian wildlife, wrote a paper on the destruction caused by them. Captain Roger stated, "The loss of property, which the ravages of carnivora entailed, amounted to 10 million pounds annually." A large share was attributed to tigers. The England parliament proposed destroying the carnivores as much as possible. Locals were given award for producing the tail of the killed animal for incentive.

So we can very well visualise the scale of destruction of domestic animals at that time by wild carnivores. Now this indicates that panthers & tigers do not depend on wild ungulates alone as a source of food. The tendency being to exert less to procure food, carnivores adapted to kill domestic animals.

In 1875 when Fayrer's book was published with the statistics, the population of wild ungulates in the jungles of India was so thick that one cannot imagine. Near Udaipur there was a *Shikar gaah* (hunting reserve) of Maharana of Udaipur called Jaisamand. Till the early 50s, whenever we ventured through Jaisamand Game Reserve of the Maharana, we had to get out of the vehicle at night to move herds of sambhar (*Cervus unicolor*), which roamed in large numbers, out of the path. They would be standing around dazzled by the artificial light of our car headlights.

In Jaisamand, there is a hill called Roothi Rani Ka Mahal. Maharana Fateh Singh once organised a beat (*hakka*. Villagers make a lot of noise and move in a ring or semi circle to chase an animal towards a shikari) on this hill and dozens of sambhars simply fell off the hill and got killed as a result. After that the Maharana never had a beat on that hill again.

In spite of such a thick population of wild ungulates, the Maharanas of Udaipur received daily complaints from different villages about the big cats doing considerable damage to their livestock. They often sent their courtesans to destroy the marauders.

Nowadays, this problem has taken a colossal dimension because the population of domestic animals have increased manifold. And since this is the Media Era, the man animal conflict is getting highlighted out of proportion.

Wild carnivores have a particular track of their own to move in the jungles that they follow regularly. Wildlife experts must trace down these jungle paths. As the numbers of vultures and scavengers have reduced significantly, the dead cattle and domestic animals keep lying around and rotting for weeks. These dead animals can be picked up and kept on the jungle tracks for the wild carnivores to feast upon. This will help in making the wild carnivores thrive, reduce the number of attacks on cattle and eventually reduce the number of man-eaters too.

- There is a belief that carnivores prefer fresh meat, killed by them. They don't go for dead animals, which they come across by chance. This is an absolutely wrong notion (Tehsin, 1979, 1993 and 2016). They prefer high meat, because it is very easy to tear it apart. In late 50s in the jungles of Kumbhlagarh, I observed a leopard on a carcass of a cow that was literally covered by maggots. A leopard came across this kill and licked up the maggots like cream. Then it started eating the flesh.

The other way to reduce the man-animal conflict is to increase the population of wild ungulates, namely hares and the wild boars, both of which are prolific breeders, as a prey for wild carnivores. Separate big enclosures can be made in the jungles to breed them. The excess stock can be released in the jungles at regular intervals for the wild carnivores to prey upon.

Such practical and easy measures should be taken by the forest authorities to decrease the man animal conflict.

References

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