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HUMAN AND WILDLIFE CONFLICT

Human-wildlife conflict refers to the negative interaction between wild animals and humans. This usually occurs when the growing human population overlaps with wildlife territory that has been established. These negative interactions impact humans, their resources, wild animals and their habitat.

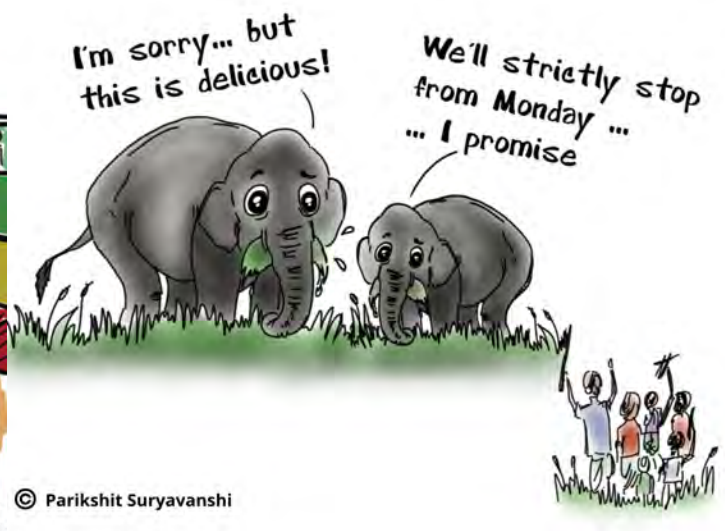
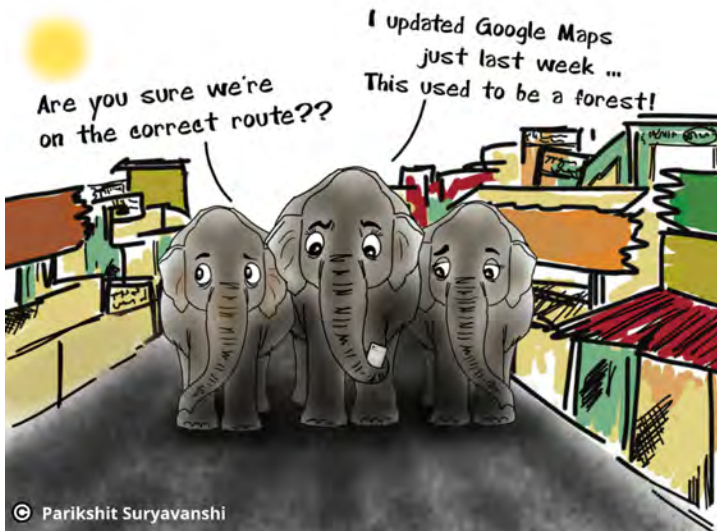
Human and wildlife interactions can be seen throughout history where both positive and negative impacts on humans and wildlife have been observed. Some positive impacts include increasing agricultural productivity, food production and industrial aesthetics. On the other hand, a negative association arises when wild animals prey on livestock, damage crops, injure or kill humans.



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There is always a reason behind each human-wildlife conflict. One of the biggest causes conflict is deforestation. Deforestation involves the conversion of forested areas to farms, agricultural crop lands and urbanization, amongst many. One such conflict that occurs often with deforestation is human-elephant conflict. Elephants need an extensive area to move, feed and reproduce as they are social animals that travel in herds of up 5 to 20 individuals. Asian elephants have a home range of 100 - 1000km² which means that they need this large amount of space to thrive.

Without an extensive home range, they will eventually encroach and wander into human settlements. When this happens, the elephants could damage crops, destroy houses, or if the conflict is uncontrolled, it might result in injuries or even death to both elephants and humans.



In addition to deforestation, the loss of wildlife habitat is another reason as to why human-wildlife conflict happens. An example of wild animals that lost their habitat and were forced to look for a new area are the orangutan. Orangutans are arboreal which means they spend almost all of their time on trees. With a loss of habitat, there is a chance they will move to human settlements to look for food and this may result in a conflict. Without proper handling of these animals, serious injuries may be inflicted on both animals and humans. Humans and closely related primates such as orangutans share almost 97 percent DNA sequence. This means that they are susceptible to human diseases and vice versa. These diseases can be easily transmitted, especially for when food is involved and thus posing food security risks for both sides if any of the food gets contaminated.

Apart from deforestation and habitat loss, other causes of human-wildlife conflict can be attributed to a declining number of preys in the wildlife. The impacts of deforestation and habitat loss directly disrupts the food chain in the forest ecosystem. For example, when the number of preys like deers and pigs decline, the tiger will start to expand its hunting range.



It may lead them to human populated areas such as a village where they can find food to replace their prey. A conflict occurs when the tiger starts to prey on livestock such as chickens, cows and goats. The conflict may worsen when the tiger starts attacking the villagers which would result in death or injuries for both sides.

Nevertheless, the conflict between human and wildlife can be reduced and controlled with proper management. One good way to handle the conflict is to build wildlife corridors. This initiative provides a safe pathway to wildlife as they travel a larger area of undamaged habitat. Creating a corridor for wildlife can reduce the potential conflict hotspots such as villages or farms. The animals are able to move about safely, out of harm's way and avoid conflict with humans.



Another way to reduce human-wildlife conflict is by using non-lethal electric fences. This is a method used to deter wildlife from human areas. This method is still debated by conservationists as it affects wildlife behaviour. In Africa, natural barriers are created to maintain a safe distance with wildlife, especially to keep the African elephants away from their farms and housing areas. An example of a natural barrier is by placing bee hives in strategic locations to create a fence to deter the elephants from crossing through. Elephants will avoid areas where bee hives or swarms are present. Planting a few rows of chili peppers is another prevention method used. This creates a buffer zone that is unpleasant to the elephants, causing them to move on to other areas.



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We can also combat the conflict by introducing ecotourism and increasing public awareness. Ecotourism that is owned and operated by local communities can be a good way to help to improve the impoverished regions by providing job opportunities and boosting the local economy. In addition, running ecotourism activities can increase awareness and

provide capacity building opportunities to local communities and visitors on how to manage conflicts between humans and wildlife. As individuals, we can do our part to reduce conflict with wildlife too. The first is to avoid feeding wild animals. All wild animals are naturally afraid of humans, and the



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conflict can happen when animals are habituated to humans who provide them with food. Their natural behaviour is to forage, so by providing them with food, humans are interfering and changing the natural behaviour of wild animals.

We are also able to reduce human-wildlife conflict through preparations on our part before we head off on outdoor activities such as hiking, trekking, or camping. It would be best to be equipped with the knowledge of the wildlife in the area. We are then able to avoid mishandling or coming in direct contact with wildlife that should not be disturbed.



Lastly, if the human-wildlife conflict is unavoidable and causing damage to properties, do not approach and harass them. Directly report to the relevant authorities that have been trained to handle wild animals. Through collaborative conservation efforts, we are able to shift from human-wildlife conflicts to coexisting with wildlife.

