



WWF

FACT SHEET

LIVING
HIMALAYAS

Reducing Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Eastern Himalayas

THE THREAT

As human populations expand and natural habitats shrink, people and animals are increasingly coming into conflict over living space and food. The impacts are often huge – people lose their crops, livestock, property, and sometimes their lives. The animals, many of which are already threatened, are often killed in retaliation. In the Eastern Himalayas, elephants, tigers, leopards, snow leopards and rhinos are particularly susceptible.

Human-wildlife conflict is one of the main threats to the continued survival of these species and others as well as a significant threat to local human populations. If solutions to conflicts are not adequate,

local support for conservation also declines. The good news is that WWF and its partners have a number of projects throughout the Eastern Himalayas aimed at reducing conflict and improving the livelihoods of the people affected. It is about finding solutions that lead to mutually beneficial coexistence.

HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

The elephant requires a large home range and is usually one of the first species to suffer the consequences of habitat loss and fragmentation. In search of food, many find their way to the fields of local villages where small farmers can lose their entire year's livelihood overnight from an elephant raid. This leads to increasing

conflict between people and elephants, which can be fatal for both people and elephants.

The North Bank Landscape – located north of the mighty Brahmaputra River in Assam and extending into the state of Arunachal Pradesh – is home to one of the largest populations of Asian elephants left in the world. Nearly 3,000 elephants, or about 10% of the species' population, live here. So do 75 million people. As a result, human-elephant conflict is rife.

Work by WWF and its partners to reduce this conflict includes setting up anti depredation squads and providing them training and equipping them to drive away elephants using non-violent methods such



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as beating drums, bursting small fire-crackers, shining bright search lights and even chili “bombs”. A second line of defense to deal with crop-raiding elephants involves rapid response squads of specially trained domestic elephants, known as *kunkis*, who with their *mahouts* (elephant handlers), help drive off their wild cousins. Such an innovative technique has proven highly successful and is being replicated in other parts of the region. This method of human-elephant conflict mitigation is also known as the ‘Sonitpur model’ as it was successfully applied first in the Sonitpur district of Assam in India.

HUMAN-WILD CAT CONFLICT

As tigers and snow leopards continue to lose their habitat and natural prey, they are increasingly coming into conflict with humans as they attack livestock; sometimes people. The cost to farmers and shepherds can be high. In retaliation, tigers and leopards are often killed by angry villagers.

To reduce the conflict, WWF is engaged in a number of projects throughout the Eastern Himalayas. Farmer compensation/insurance schemes for livestock, particularly sheep and cattle, killed in tiger attacks around India’s Corbett and Kaziranga Tiger Reserves, and for snow leopard attacks within Nepal’s Kangchenjunga Complex, have proven successful, deterring villages from killing offending cats. WWF and its partners have also established a compensation fund in Bhutan for livestock killed by tigers and snow leopards.

Creating more Protected Areas and buffer zones with human settlements as well as viable wildlife corridors linking tiger and snow leopard habitats is another way to reduce conflict. This is being done on a large scale in the Terai Arc Landscape where 14 National Parks, Sanctuaries and Reserves in India and Nepal are being reconnected to the benefit of animals and people. Healthy tiger and snow leopard

habitats provide people with food sources and clean water, and ecotourism in Protected Areas that have these species provide communities with jobs and income.

HUMAN-RHINO CONFLICT

The greater one-horned rhino is a conservation success story in India and Nepal – numbers have increased from 200 at the turn of the 20th century to about 2,800 today. But with this success has come conflict: the growing rhino population increasingly competes with humans and has known to raid crops. This leads to retaliatory actions from affected farmers. One way WWF seeks to reduce conflict is to translocate rhinos that have outgrown their Protected Areas, which often border human populations. In Nepal, rhinos have been successfully translocated from Chitwan National Park to Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve. In India, the Rhino Vision 2020 project is translocating rhinos from high-density areas like Kaziranga National Park and Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary to other secure rhino habitats in Assam such as Manas National Park.

THE SOLUTIONS

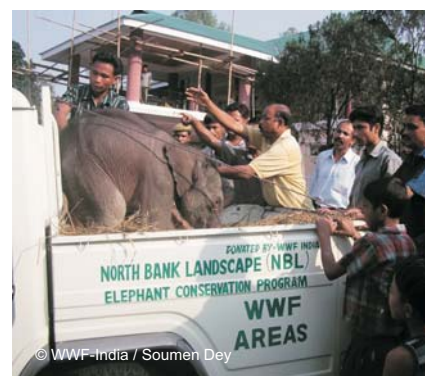
WWF views human-wildlife conflict as a priority issue for its work on species conservation. A key aspect of any work is that it benefits both the wildlife and local people. In most cases, creative solutions have demonstrated that people can live alongside wildlife while developing sustainable livelihoods.

To reduce human-wildlife conflict, WWF’s Living Himalayas Initiative continues to focus on:

- Improving livestock management practices, including corralling animals at night and installing low-cost barriers, such as trenches and fences, to keep big cats away from their fields
- Initiating livestock insurance and compensation schemes to reduce the loss

or farmer would otherwise kill wildlife in retaliation

- Providing communities with alternative livelihoods, such as ecotourism
- Improving enforcement of anti-poaching regulations throughout the region and conducting training programmes for local wildlife officials and local youths
- Increasing Protected Areas and corridors for wildlife away from human settlement



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