

HUMAN–LEOPARD CONFLICT IN THE HIMALAYA

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Degradation - Wildlife related issues

A camera trap photo of a leopard with its cub in Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand. | Photo Credit: [Wildlife Institute of India](#)

Human–animal conflict is common in the Himalaya like any other region where wildlife and people live together. A study of patterns of leopard attacks here reveal that some areas are high-risk zones requiring urgent conservation measures for the safety of both man and beast.

The foothills of the eastern Himalaya in northern West Bengal — called the dooars, a landscape comprising tea plantations and forests — alone have witnessed more than 700 leopard attacks on people between 1990 and 2016. In the western Himalaya (Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand), numerous leopards have been killed in retaliation to the human deaths and injuries they have caused.

Scientists at the Wildlife Institute of India studied patterns of leopard attacks in both these regions. To list leopard attacks from 2000 to 2016, they accessed published literature, newspaper reports and data on monetary compensation awarded by forest departments. They visited 101 sites of attacks to confirm the details of incidents. On an average, leopards killed more than three and injured 11 people in Pauri each year between 2006 and 2016; in turn, 121 leopards met their ends at the hands of people. In the dooars, while 420 people were injured between 2011 and 2016 alone, there were barely any retaliatory killings.

The researchers find that around 97% of animal attacks in the dooars and 60% in Pauri resulted in human injuries. While a majority of the victims in Pauri were children and youth, middle-aged tea estate workers were most at risk in the dooars.

Despite this, 368 interviews with locals in both areas revealed that 41% of respondents in Pauri and 75 % in the dooars were positive towards the presence and conservation of leopards.

“The high percentage of positivism in the dooars is largely due to the strong foundation of Joint Forest Management activities that have long been practised here, leading to better awareness and participation of local communities in conservation,” said S. Sathyakumar from Wildlife Institute of India, and coauthor of a study published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

As part of the study, the team also used these data to develop a predictive risk map. This reveals that central and northern Pauri, as well as the protected and peripheral areas of central and south-western dooars are ‘high risk zones’.

They suggest that immediate measures — including regular monitoring by wildlife managers and local response teams, providing proper lighting in villages and clearing bushes around houses — would be crucial to mitigate conflict.

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