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HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

- Wildlife can threaten people's safety and livelihoods, which can lead to conflicts between groups of people over how to resolve the situation; experts call this 'human-wildlife conflict'.
- Human-wildlife conflicts are becoming more frequent, serious and widespread as human populations grow and habitats are lost.
- Effectively managing human-wildlife conflicts protects communities, stops conflicts escalating, builds trust in conservation and avoids retaliation against wildlife.
- Human-wildlife conflicts have unique ecological, cultural, social, historical, physical, economic and political characteristics which strategies to manage conflicts must consider.

What is the issue?

Wildlife can pose a **direct threat to the safety, livelihoods and wellbeing of people**. For example, when elephants forage on crops, seals damage fishing nets or jaguars kill livestock, people can lose their livelihoods. Retaliation against the species blamed often ensues.

The term human-wildlife conflict has traditionally been applied only to these negative interactions between people and wildlife, but this implies deliberate action by wildlife species and ignores the **conflicts between groups of people** about what should be done to resolve the situation.

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group defines human-wildlife conflict as:

struggles that emerge when the presence or behaviour of wildlife poses an actual or perceived, direct and recurring threat to human interests or needs, leading to disagreements between groups of people and negative impacts on people and/or wildlife.

Human-wildlife conflicts are becoming **more frequent, serious and widespread** because of **human population growth, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, climate change** and other drivers of habitat loss. Human-wildlife conflicts can occur wherever wildlife and human populations overlap, so any factor that forces wildlife and people into closer contact makes conflicts more likely.

Much work to date has focussed on interventions to reduce impacts on people and retaliation against wildlife such as creating barriers, deploying deterrents or moving wildlife.

In the absence of consultative, collaborative processes with stakeholders, these measures often have limited success.



A lion kills a donkey on the boundary of Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, Botswana © James Stevens

Why is this important?

Healthy ecosystems and the vital services they provide to people depend on wildlife. Managing human-wildlife conflicts is therefore crucial to achieve the **UN Vision for Biodiversity 2050** in which 'humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected'.

Human-wildlife conflicts have severe implications for communities' livelihoods, safety and wellbeing, and risk undermining conservation efforts by eroding support for protected areas, wildlife and biodiversity.

Retaliation against wildlife can pose a serious threat to a species' survival, and reverse previous conservation progress.

For example, wolves, bears and other large carnivores are recovering across Europe, leading to tensions over how to manage their presence, which is welcomed by some and perceived as a risk to safety and livelihoods by others.

What can be done?

Human-wildlife conflict is recognised as a global concern in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity’s [post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#) (to be adopted by Parties at CBD COP15 Part Two). Related to this, many governments are beginning to **include the management of human-wildlife conflict in national policies and strategies** to ensure resources are made available to manage them.

There are [numerous approaches and measures that can be taken](#) to reduce the damage or impacts, de-escalate tensions, address risks to income and poverty, and develop sustainable solutions.

These sometimes include barriers (fences, nets, trenches), guarding and early-warning systems, deterrents and repellents (sirens, lights, beehives), translocation (moving wildlife), compensation or insurance, providing risk-reducing alternatives, as well as managing tensions between stakeholders involved in these situations.

Effective planning and implementation of such measures requires consideration of **good principles in community led-conservation**, in collaboration with the communities affected.



Asian elephants damage crops in Assam, India
© Assam Haathi Project/Chester Zoo

Research has shown that **conflicts are complex** and each situation has **unique ecological, cultural, social, historical, physical, economic and political characteristics**.

Although it is tempting to transfer approaches for damage reduction (e.g. fences, barriers) that appear helpful in one area directly to another, these only succeed if achieved through consultative, collaborative processes with stakeholders.

There can be pressure for ‘quick fixes’ to human-wildlife conflicts, but **actions that do not consider the wider social and local contexts can lead to unintended consequences** and increase tensions.

These can escalate into deeper divisions in which stakeholders perceive the conflict over wildlife to threaten their values or identity. Such situations become extremely difficult to resolve. In tensions over wolves in parts of North America for example, the relationship between stakeholders has deteriorated to deeply polarised conflict. In such cases, **professional mediation and reconciliation processes** (as used in peacebuilding) are needed.

Levels of Conflict



The levels of conflict over wildlife
© Zimmermann et al 2020

Efforts to assess and manage complex human-wildlife conflicts require collaboration across disciplines and sectors. For example, collaborations could involve conservation practitioners, community leaders, governments, researchers, businesses and other stakeholders; and need expertise in ecology, social psychology, economics, peacebuilding and environmental law.

Where can I get more information?

IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group: hwctf.org
hwctf.org/document-library - resource library
hwctf.org/policies - briefing papers
hwctf.org/guidelines - guidance

IUCN Resolution WCC-2020-Res-101 *Addressing human-wildlife conflict: fostering a safe and beneficial coexistence of people and wildlife* iucncongress2020.org/motion/117

IUCN (2020) IUCN SSC Position Statement on the Management of Human-Wildlife Conflict:
iucn.org/theme/species/publications/policies-and-position-statements