

Capacity building of wildlife managers in dealing with wildlife emergencies

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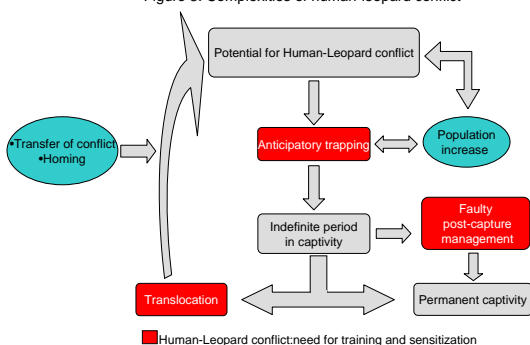
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Introduction

- In India, protected areas constitute only 5.2% of total land area, but wildlife occurs in unprotected human dominated landscapes as well.
- The most common wildlife emergencies are due to presence of species like leopards, wolves, hyenas near human habitations, sometimes even in cities (Fig. 1, 2)
- Following our research on Human-Leopard conflict in Junnar(Maharashtra), we felt the need for training and sensitisation of wildlife managers because:
 - They deal with wildlife emergencies without appropriate expertise or support (Fig. 1)
 - This leads to avoidance of / improper use of chemical restraint methods (Fig. 1)
 - Their response to wildlife emergency is usually a knee-jerk reaction due to lack of policy and lack of consultation with wildlife professionals (Fig. 3, 4, 5). As a result, the problem is further compounded.

Figure 3: Complexities of human-leopard conflict



Objectives

- Sensitise wildlife managers to issues concerning scientific management of wildlife conflicts/emergencies.
- Initiate preparation of guidelines/policy for dealing with wildlife emergencies.
- Demystify the process of chemical restraint of wild animals and remote drug delivery.

Materials and methods

- We conducted capacity building workshops in seven high human-wildlife conflict states
 - Remote Drug Delivery Equipment was provided:indigenously developed,cost effective. A manual on "Dealing with Wildlife Emergencies" was also provided.
 - Capture and post-capture management
 - Human-Wildlife conflict case studies : Complexities in the biology of wild species and better,scientific methods of dealing with conflicts
- Target audience were Forest department personnel, local veterinary officers, volunteers, police and fire brigade personnel
- We also assisted the Maharashtra State Forest Department rescue or treat endangered wild carnivores
 - Created an opportunity for hands on training of the managers
 - Initiated PIT tagging of wild carnivores caught in conflict situations

Figure 1 & 2: Delayed response by authorities results in attacks on people and retaliatory killings



The 10 commandments of wildlife interventions

- ensure safety of people
- justify need for the intervention
- consider legality of the intervention
- respect and understand the wild animal
- consider the prognosis or outcome of intervention
- consider the practicality of intervention
- plan, plan, plan
- minimise stress to wild animal
- understand and accept limitations
- create, update and share a database

Figure 4 & 5: Inappropriate handling of wild animals causing further stress and injury



Results

- A total of 20 workshops were conducted, attended by over 1000 people.
- In Maharashtra 5 Wildlife emergency teams were constituted and trained (Fig. 6)
 - These teams have successfully handled several wildlife emergencies since their inception (Fig. 7)
 - The Maharashtra Forest Department now recommends PIT tagging all wild caught leopards.
 - We believe that better understanding of scientific issues related to conflict has resulted in very low levels of leopard conflict in Maharashtra state subsequently.
- The Forest Departments of Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh have initiated similar capacity building programmes.
- Based on these workshops, we published a manual on human-leopard conflict management which was
 - endorsed by the Maharashtra Forest Department
 - requested by the Forest departments of seven other affected states.
 - translated in two local languages viz. Marathi (2000 copies) and Hindi (600 copies)



Figure 6 & 7: Training of rescue teams and successful rescue of a trapped leopard

Conclusions

- A further sustained effort is necessary to bring about countrywide systemic change in the way wildlife emergencies are dealt with.
- Wildlife research projects should incorporate capacity building/ training of wildlife managers especially in countries like India.

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Acknowledgments

The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation, U.K. for funding the two projects (Vidya Athreya,2005 and Aniruddha Belsare, 2006) and also for the travel grant for attending this meeting.

The State Forest Departments of the following states: Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttaranchal.

Wildlife Protection Society of India, New Delhi.

Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi.

Abi Tamim Vanak, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA.

