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HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT: CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

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INTRODUCTION

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) dates back to prehistoric times. The earliest forms of conflict occurred during the predation of prehistoric man and early hominoids (Berger and McGraw, 2007). Human-wildlife conflict is one of the growing issues worldwide. The animals that we are not able to domesticate come under the category of wildlife. Human-wildlife conflict means any interaction between humans and wildlife that negatively affects human or wildlife populations (Madden, 2010). It is evident from historical scriptures that conflicts between humans and wildlife have been prevalent since ancient civilisation. Studies of Reymond Dart on fossils remains excavated from South Africa reveals that even before 3000 years back, human-wildlife conflict existed.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

In the current scenario, Human-wildlife conflict is the major challenge in the conservation aspect of biodiversity. The type of conflict varies with different geographies. The types of vegetation and landscape patterns have an essential role in determining the nature of conflicts. The major wildlife species involved in conflicts in Kerala are elephants, wild boar, tiger, leopard, porcupine, monkey, wild gaur, sambar deer, snakes, etc. Wildlife cause property damage, crop damage, casualties, livestock depredation and results in developing social

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insecurity among the affected individuals. There are several reasons behind human-wildlife conflicts. Cattle grazing and forest fire impart loss of natural forest resources, and invasive alien plant species in forest areas destroy endemic plant species in a particular forest area. This result in scarcity of natural plant species dependent on most herbivorous animals, and therefore they move towards fringe areas of forest and cause damage to cultivated crops. During the last five years, 519 human lives have been lost due to wildlife attacks in Kerala. This itself shows the intensity of conflict in Kerala. Traditional methods like trenches, different types of fences were employed to combat conflict.

Due to the increasing intensity of wildlife attacks, many farmers discontinued agriculture and are trying alternate ways for their livelihood. Human-wildlife conflict is multifactorial, and it involves socio-economic, cultural, political and biological aspects. A comprehensive conflict mapping is required to understand the actual depth of the issue. A genuine scientific investigation is required to determine the causes of conflict and find out the root cause. Then only formulation of appropriate mitigation measures will happen. Both species wise and landscapes studies are required for the complete understanding of the conflict. Therefore, the governments should take appropriate steps to control and mitigate the conflict issues scientifically and systematically to conserve biodiversity, agriculture, and people's livelihood near forest fringes.

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