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RESOLVING HUMAN-LARGE FELID CONFLICTS ASSOCIATED WITH PROTECTED AREAS IN INDIA

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Abstract: In India, the past 2 decades of improved wildlife management practices along with rigid legal provisions have resulted in increased populations of the endangered carnivores: tiger (*Panthera tigris*), lion (*Panthera leo*), and leopard (*Panthera pardus*) in protected areas (PAs). Over this time period, human and livestock populations in and around PAs have also increased substantially. Intense human use and commensurate cattle grazing activity in associated forests have invariably lead to confrontation with these carnivores. Incidences of human- and cattle-killing by tiger, lion, and leopard have increased in and around PAs. Ongoing conflicts occur with human-killing tigers from 2 tiger reserves, Sunderbans in West Bengal and Dudhwa in Uttar Pradesh. Sporadic incidents of non-fatal and fatal attacks occur in most tiger areas. Lion attacks on humans have increased recently around the Gir forest. Human and cattle injury or killing by leopards occur throughout their range but is most common in Himachal Pradesh and Garwal and Kumaon regions of Uttar Pradesh. Even the presence of a tiger, lion, or a leopard in the vicinity of human habitations, particularly leopards around urban areas, is considered a severe threat. Tiger, lion, and leopards have adapted to changing habitat and prey-base conditions. Human-killing behavior and predation on cattle are the main issues of confrontation when these carnivores stray outside PAs and pose threats. This has led to a strong resentment among the general populace, who show increased apathy and antagonism towards wildlife conservation. Successful resolution of conflicts require evaluation and documentation of the circumstances of each attack event. Public education, observance of precautions around areas known to be frequented by these cats, and adherence to regulations regarding management of these species will reduce incidences of conflict. Although all 3 cats are endangered and therefore protected, problem individuals may be legally captured and relocated to zoos. Confirmed human-killers may be legally destroyed after proper investigation and documentation. Financial compensation for losses is another way to reduce conflicts.

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Key words: human-killer, India, leopard, lion, *Panthera leo*, *Panthera pardus*, *Panthera tigris*, tiger.
