

# Sustaining people and planet

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When urbanisation drove wildlife out of their natural environment, they were viewed as a nuisance or superfluous beings, and man-animal conflict arose. For example, baboons and mongoose are seen as bothersome crop-raiders, the advantages of carnivores in reducing herbivore pressure on plants by restricting their number are underappreciated, and the role of decomposers in releasing nutrients into the soil is neglected. Furthermore, carnivores are targets of illegal actions because they are seen as rivals or dangers to food supplies. Needless to say, the environmental harm produced by this cruel and barbaric attitude towards our species has rendered environmental deterioration so obvious that it cannot not be ignored. As a result, activities that promote habitat restoration and wildlife preservation have spared a few species from extinction. However, the dwindling animal population raises an important question – why are we at odds with nature and its inhabitants when coexistence between man and the environment is the answer to all problems?

Robust wildlife populations play an important role in human well-being by improving mental health, ecological health, tourism, and related local economies, outdoor recreation sectors, and livelihoods. While certain species help with nutrient extraction from the cycle, others speed up decomposition and the carbon and nitrogen cycles. We will observe huge advances in ecosystem health, agricultural stability, and food security, and encourage the formation of new sustainable economies when humans coexist with wildlife. Cohabitation with nature is critical for all living things, including people and animals.

To reduce conflicts between human populations and wildlife and promote the coexistence of man and animals, the destruction and divergence of forest land need to be prevented at all costs. Loss of habitat and fragmentation of forests is the root cause of man-animal conflicts. When we invade natural habitats for commercial purposes, we fail to realise that we're uprooting an entire ecosystem. We seem to turn a blind eye to environmental health and the wide variety of plants and animals that will be severely affected because of these activities.

In addition to this, the rural and tribal communities also face the brunt of our insensitive approach towards the environment. When wildlife corridors are blocked, animals stray into neighbouring human settlements which results in the destruction of crops and livestock and increases the chances of conflict with the villagers. Thus, educating local communities on how to tackle such situations is also an efficient way to handle the increasing problems of man-animal conflict.

Wildlife corridors are often threatened by linear infrastructure and other anthropogenic activities. Tigers and other wildlife populations will not be jeopardised by modern development if thoughtful spatial planning is constructively used to avoid encroaching on natural habitats and their linkages. The creation of no-go zones and strict consequences for the construction of infrastructure in wildlife areas must be observed.

Planting a barrier of crops that repel wildlife associated with causing property damage or other barrier measures can be devised to keep them away from human settlements. For instance, barriers made of wooden poles, wire mesh, and nylon have been installed to prevent tigers from entering the villages in Sunderbans.

'Forests and livelihoods: Sustaining people and planet' is the theme for World Animal day 2021. I believe that we can live up to this theme all round the year by establishing afforestation drives that benefit socio-environmental systems. While these significant days serve as a reminder of our environmental responsibilities, our ecosystems can only be healed through a long-term commitment to the planet.

Our responsibility is to learn how to coexist with our natural environment and wildlife. Coexistence does not include indiscriminate killing. Killing wildlife that share landscapes with us is neither sustainable nor in our best interest.

(The author is the CEO of Grow-Trees.com, a website which has created the concept of 'Greet with Trees', where one can plant trees to support projects like Trees for Tribals, Trees for Tigers, and so on.)



**Bikrant Tiwary underlines the importance of coexistence between man and environment while emphasising that it is the ultimate solution to ending the conflict between the two**

The fact is that no species has ever had such wholesale control over everything on earth, living or dead, as we now have. That lays upon us, whether we like it or not, an awesome responsibility. David Attenborough once said, "In our hands now lies not only our own future, but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth."

The above lines instill a sense of pride in me. It is a privilege to know that man has the responsibility to maintain healthy ecosystems and conserve nature's wonders for future generations. However, our disregard for the environment and depletion of natural resources has led us to abuse this advantage, robbing our wildlife of their natural habitat and disturbing the ecological balance.

The modern era is primarily dominated by humans and the adverse effects of human activities are felt across the globe in the form of climate change and global warming. It is for the same reason that scientists have named this era Anthropocene. Humans have altered natural ecosystems through rapid urbanisation, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, habitat fragmentation, and destruction. According to recent studies conducted by conservation organisations and the United Nations, human activities have led to a 60 per cent decline in animal populations worldwide, and roughly one million of the species known to science are on the brink of extinction.

Animals and birds are just as important as humans in preserving the planet's natural equilibrium. Every organism on our planet has a unique place in the food chain and contributes to the ecosystem in its own manner. The ecosystem consists of interactions between species linked by food webs and food chains. Even the extinction of a single animal species can disrupt the entire food chain, resulting in horrifying repercussions.