HUMAN ANIMAL CONFLICT - GS III MAINS

Q. Human-wildlife conflict is a development and humanitarian issue affecting the men and materials of the region. Discuss the factors increasing its instances in the recent times. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Wayanad elephant kills man: Behind escalating human-animal conflict in Kerala*

What's in the news?
- Wayanad is on the boil after a radio-collared wild elephant chased a 47-year-old man and trampled him to death, inside a gated property in a residential area.
- Locals allege inaction on the part of forest and revenue officials and are demanding the capture of the killer elephant.

Key takeaways:
- The tragedy brings to attention escalating human-animal conflict in the state. Increased incidence of wild animals, mainly elephants, tigers, bison and wild boars, attacking human beings have been reported from across the state.
- Government data for 2022-23 recorded 8,873 wild animal attacks, of which, 4193 were by wild elephants, 1524 by wild boars, 193 by tigers, 244 by leopards, and 32 by bison. Of 98 reported deaths, 27 were due to elephant attacks.

Human-Animal Conflict:
- Human-wildlife conflict is when encounters between humans and wildlife lead to negative results, such as loss of property, livelihoods and even life.

Factors Causing Human-Animal Conflict:
1. 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.
- The threat also increases with fragmentation and loss of water resource.
2. Deforestation and Agricultural Extension in Forest Areas:
- It leads to a decline in the buffer areas that separate humans and animals. This result in an increase in Human-Wildlife Conflict.

3. Decline in the Prey to the Animals:
- In the Jorhat rampage, it is believed that the animal escaped the nearby Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in search of food.

4. Increase in Wildlife Population:
- There has been an increase in the population of some flagship species viz., Indian bison, Indian Leopard, and Indian elephant, in recent times. This increase in the wild population is due to an imbalance in the ecological food chain.

5. Competition for Resource:
- As human populations and demand for space continue to grow, people and wildlife are increasingly interacting and competing for resources, which can lead to increased human-wildlife conflict.

6. Infrastructure Development:
- Railways track and roads built in nearby areas to the forest or going through the forest areas increases the chance of human-animal conflict.

7. Use of Animals in Captivity:
- They lose control over their lives and their environment. Social animals are often forced to live in the misery of solitary confinement.
- E.g. Elephants are used in religious gatherings, e.g., in Kerala temples, where they lost control and sometimes caused loss of humans and property.

Impacts of Human-Animal Conflict:

1. Casualties of Livestock Predation:
- Leopards attack pet animals like Dogs and livestock, is a grave concern in human-wildlife concern.

2. Against Animal Welfare:
- People turn violent against wild animals in this conflict. This affect animal welfare and their rights.
- For example, A pregnant elephant died after a local allegedly fed her a pineapple stuffed with crackers, in Malappuram.

3. Threat to Human Lives:
- Leopards and elephants were mainly involved in human death. Among human casualties of conflict with animals, elephants killed 1,579 humans in three years — 585 in 2019-20, 461 in 2020-21, and 533 in 2021-22.
- Odisha accounted for the highest number of these deaths at 322.

4. Decline and Potential Eradication of Species:
- Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, 222 elephants were killed by electrocution across the country, 45 by trains, 29 by poachers and 11 by poisoning.

5. Crop Raiding:
- It lead to crop loss and income risk to the farmers.
- Elephant and monkey is involved in crop raiding.

6. Development and Humanitarian Issues:

- Human-wildlife conflict is, therefore, as much a development and humanitarian issue as it is a conservation concern, affecting the income of farmers, herders, and artisanal fishers - particularly those with incomes below the poverty line.

7. Loss to Communities:

- It can experience financial losses and livelihoods, food security, and property due to man-animal conflict. It also causes migration of the people.

8. Wildlife Crime:

- If not addressed adequately, Human-Wildlife conflict (HWC) may drive wildlife crime.

Government Measures:

1. Project Elephant:

- It was launched by the Government of India in the year 1992 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

2. Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:

- It lays down the rules and regulations for the conservation and protection of Animals in India.

3. Protected Areas and Reserves:

- There are 106 National Parks, 567 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 105 existing Conservation Reserves.

4. Project Tiger:

- It was launched by the Government of India in 1973, initially, the Project started with 9 tiger reserves, at present there are 54 tiger reserves in India.

5. Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE):

- It was established by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) at the tenth Conference of the Parties in 1997.
- It measures the levels, trends and causes of elephant mortality, providing an information base to support international decision-making related to conservation of elephants in Asia and Africa.

6. Operation Thunderbird:

- Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, coordinated Operation in India to fight against wildlife crime.

7. Plan Bee:

- It is adopted by the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) which is a unique method to keep elephants away from railway tracks and plans are afoot to implement it all over the country to save the lives of elephants.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Awareness:

- The communication and interaction between the forest department and the locals has to be improved so that they can be sensitized about the issues and animals.

2. Wildlife corridors:

- Corridors allow animals to freely move from one habitat patch to another without crossing human-caused barriers which can put animals, and potentially humans, in danger.

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

4. Increase in Protected Areas:
- To conserve the animals and avoid any human-animal interaction more protected areas need to be developed by the Government.

5. Other Measures:
- Includes 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.