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0521825059 - People and Wildlife: Conflict or Coexistence?

Edited by Rosie Woodroffe, Simon Thirgood and Alan Rabinowitz

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People and Wildlife Conflict or Coexistence?

Human-wildlife conflict is a major issue in conservation. As people encroach into natural habitats, and as conservation efforts restore wildlife to areas where they may have been absent for generations, contact between people and wild animals is growing. Some species, even the beautiful and endangered, can have serious impacts on human lives and livelihoods. Tigers kill people, elephants destroy crops and African wild dogs devastate sheep herds left unattended. Historically, people have responded to these threats by killing wildlife wherever possible, and this has led to the endangerment of many species that are difficult neighbours. The urgent need to conserve such species, however, demands coexistence of people and endangered wildlife. This book presents a variety of solutions to human-wildlife conflicts, including novel and traditional farming practices, offsetting the costs of wildlife damage through hunting and tourism, and the development of local and national policies.

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Conservation biology is a flourishing field, but there is still enormous potential for making further use of the science that underpins it. This new series aims to present internationally significant contributions from leading researchers in particularly active areas of conservation biology. It will focus on topics where basic theory is strong and where there are pressing problems for practical conservation. The series will include both single-authored and edited volumes and will adopt a direct and accessible style targeted at interested undergraduates, postgraduates, researchers and university teachers. Books and chapters will be rounded, authoritative accounts of particular areas with the emphasis on review rather than original data papers. The series is the result of collaboration between the Zoological Society of London and Cambridge University Press. The series editors are Professor Morris Gosling, Professor of Animal Behaviour at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Professor John Gittleman, Professor of Biology at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Dr Rosie Woodroffe of the University of California, Davis and Dr Guy Cowlshaw of the Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London. The series ethos is that there are unexploited areas of basic science that can help define conservation biology and bring a radical new agenda to the solution of pressing conservation problems.

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Foreword

In the origin myths of many human cultures, a central theme is the distinguishing of humans from the rest of nature (Lévi-Strauss 1964). According to these histories, before humans as humans existed, people lived in a way indistinguishable from other animals – depending on wild species and eating them raw. After the origin, after emerging, after being created, after The Fall, humans are distinguishable from the rest of nature through the acquisition of culture and by means of it. People cook their food, people alter their landscape, people cultivate crops and raise domestic animals. In the words of the Judaeo-Christian Bible: ‘the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground . . .’ (Genesis 3: 23). And by contrast, wild animals define humanity. The relationship with wild species is fundamental to our self-identity. At its core, this book is about that relationship.

We humans value nature and wild species in many contexts and situations. Wild species are of cultural and social importance. They are valued as resources. We value their very existence. On the other hand, humans often and increasingly come into conflict with wildlife. We humans channel more and more of the world’s resources to support our own kind. We now channel more than 40% of the terrestrial net primary productivity, which is the sustenance of all animals and decomposers, to our own ends (Vitousek *et al.* 1986). Forty-five per cent of Asia is under cropland and permanent pasture, 36% of Africa, 30% of North America, 35% of South America, 47% of Europe, 25% of the former Soviet Union. These figures do not include managed forests, and urban and suburban sprawl. And in the seas, humans are pre-empting 25–35% of the total production of continental shelf ecosystems (World Resources Institute 1994). As wild species lose habitat, individual animals necessarily come into conflict with human beings.

Some species thrive in this human dominated world. Some we tolerate and even enjoy. Songbirds are part of our landscape. Grey squirrels (at least in North America) bother few people, with the exception of those with bird

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feeders. White-tailed deer seem part of the ex-urban landscape, but with their population growth probably are too much of a good thing. Other adaptable species we seek to extirpate. Rats, cockroaches, termites, we call 'pests', and their irrepressibility supports a whole industry of pest control. These animals affect or are perceived to affect our lives and livelihoods.

This book is really about that subset of species that are valued but also negatively affect our lives and livelihoods. Jaguars are cultural icons throughout South America, but they also are major predators of cattle. Baboons exhibit social shenanigans that keep ecotourists enthralled, but they also raid crops. Elephants elicit inordinate attention from conservationists, but they are a threat to human life and limb. Pigs, goats and donkeys are valued by animal rights advocates, but they tear up our parks and reserves. This book explores the conundrum when animal species that are valued in one context or by some people are in conflict with human needs and aspirations in another or by others.

Resolving the conundrum has absorbed considerable intellectual energy. In Europe from the Middle Ages, and to some extent in the New World, one approach was to turn to the legal system (Evans Pritchard 1906). Pigs were put on trial for killing children. Cats were put to death for excessive caterwauling (Darnton 1985). Shakespeare in *Merchant of Venice* (Act iv, scene 1) notes a wolf 'hanged for human slaughter, even from the gallows' Judicial proceedings were initiated against domestic and wild animals. Those animals found guilty and in human custody were usually put to death. A more modern approach was to argue the case in the court of public opinion seeking to have a species declared a pest or in need of protection. Once a species was considered a pest, it could be subject to lethal control, and this book catalogues the species on which we have focussed such attention. Alternatively, once a species was considered to be endangered or threatened, then it could be protected.

Many of the examples in this book avoid this dichotomous choice. Most accept that choosing unequivocally between humans and wildlife is rarely a choice. Both humans and wildlife must be accommodated. Some advocate the spatial separation of wildlife and humans, and the creation of heterogeneous landscapes. For many large-bodied animals, for predators, and for species whose existence depends on undisturbed habitats, this clearly will be necessary for their long-term survival. Other chapters suggest that coexistence in the same place is possible if the conflict can be mitigated.

Some argue that conflict can be mitigated through the scientific process, by which information made available to actors can allow more informed and rational choices. Still others urge a realigning of the economic incentives so that the benefits of coexistence outweigh the costs. Clearly both approaches

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have been successful on occasion. It is also clear, however, that there are many cases where scientific and financial arguments have no validity. For instance, no amount of scientific information or economic analyses can seemingly sway opponents of prairie dogs and wolves. Here the issue is less about ‘human–wildlife conflict’ and more about ‘human–human conflict’. Here different people have very different perceptions and values about wildlife, and resolution must reconcile different interest groups. But all of the chapters suggest that understanding the issues is a first step towards reconciling the conflict. Ultimately, if the human society is both to continue to conserve wild species and to sustain the lives and livelihoods of people that come into conflict with wildlife, then we must find ways to mitigate and resolve human–wildlife. If we fail, then we will either not meet our fundamental ethical obligation to steward the world’s species and natural systems, or not meet the obligation to sustain our fellow human beings. Such a failure is unthinkable.

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