

Navigating conflicts over iconic wildlife

The issue

Conflicts over human interactions with iconic species are some of the most intractable challenges facing conservation. As human populations expand and natural habitats shrink, people and wildlife are increasingly clashing over food and habitat.

From wolves and bears in Europe killing livestock, to elephants in Namibia destroying crops and property, the problem is universal. In Namibia, elephant-related conflict costs local farmers USD one million a year, while in Nepal conflict over wildlife can mean farming families lose up to a quarter of their household income.

In some of these conflicts, people lose not only their crops, property and livestock, but also their lives. In retaliation or to prevent future incident, the animals are often killed and many of them are already endangered. Retaliatory killing has halved the local population of the Eurasian lynx, cheetah and tiger in several regions.

Conservation strategies need to consider current conflict scenarios as well as anticipate emerging ones. In some cases, successful species recovery plans have led to new conflicts between people and wildlife. Many local communities have little or no choice of livelihood, often relying solely on agriculture. Without an assurance of physical and economic security, their support for conservation will decline.

As with most conflicts, different interest groups (hunters, local communities, conservation organisations, government agencies, etc.) with strongly held positions clash over objectives, with one party trying to impose their interests over another. Human-wildlife conflict therefore becomes compounded by human-human conflict. Some groups with direct involvement demand certain



outcomes while others, far removed from direct wildlife stewardship, demand a course of action which is not appropriate for on-the-ground realities.

This failure to address different perspectives is hampering progress in safeguarding species and livelihoods. Many approaches exist for wildlife stewardship but there is no widely accepted process to incorporate different stakeholder values that helps navigate or resolve conflict.

While efforts have been made to increase our understanding of the human dimensions of these conflicts, conservation concerns still dominate. The international community of researchers and practitioners have recognised the importance of a comprehensive approach to conservation conflict management, but still works in silos instead of addressing the bigger picture.

The response

We urgently need an overarching code of practice or global standard to ensure more coordinated management of conservation conflicts.

The Luc Hoffmann Institute is working with experts, stakeholders and organisations around the world including Griffith University, the University of Aberdeen, the IUCN-SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict Task Force, WWF Governance and Wildlife Practices, and Namibian groups to challenge the status quo of current conservation conflict management practices.

This consortium is evaluating the development of a new global standard that is fit to address complexity, and the growing challenges of conflict over wildlife. It aims to bring together various stakeholders, from community groups to international NGOs, to learn from the past and create a new roadmap for dealing with polarised views. The standard also aims to encompass good governance practice to be used by donors, governments and NGOs. Even sectors such as the military and peacekeeping are being brought in to provide new thinking. The first phase of the project began with a successful pilot phase in Namibia with a view to implementation across Africa – particularly East and Southern Africa where the community conservancy model is widespread. The second phase aims to expand practical application around the world, further refine the standard and introduce it to conservation networks, governments, donors, NGOs and the science community.

For more information, please contact:

Peter Damarell, Luc Hoffmann Institute: pdamerell@wwfint.org

Duan Biggs, Griffith University: d.biggs@griffith.edu.au, resilientconservation.org

