

Domestic and wildlife damage to crops and mitigation strategies around Rajiv Gandhi National Park (Karnataka)

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SUMMARY : A study was undertaken in the Rajeev Gandhi National Park, Karnataka to assess the crop and live stock damage caused by wild animals and to recommend mitigation strategies to control or prevent such damage. The fringe areas of the park are inhabited by tribals who traditionally cultivate food crops for their livelihood. The large population of herbivores and carnivores in the park area live in harmony as long as there is sufficient food and water. They usually do not stray out of the park area if left undisturbed. However, encroachment of the forest area for raising plantations and cultivation of crops in forest fringes attracts the wild animals during cropping and dry seasons. The wild animals stray out and cause wide spread damage to standing crops and plantations by trampling and uprooting. They also attack domestic and livestock browsing in the forest and humans entering into forest area for collection of forest products, collection of fuel wood and other activities. Thus, a conflict between man and animal has been a constant feature in the national park. The study conducted in seven ranges of Rajeev Gandhi National Park revealed that, damage and destruction of crops resulted in crop loss, injury and loss of human and cattle lives and damage to plantation crops. The findings indicated that, coffee, coconut, paddy, ragi, cotton, and tobacco are the major crops grown in the fringe areas and the maximum damage and loss to these crops is caused by elephants and wild boars. Tigers and leopards also caused greater loss of life among domestic animals like cattle, sheep, and dogs. This study recommended that, protective measures like construction or renovation of EPT (Elephant Proof Trench), fencing with electric fence or any other mechanical barrier to control the movements of wild animals and human activity within the park area have to be taken to prevent or minimize man-animal conflict and crop loss by wild animals.

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