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Tigers in Nepal take the night shift to coexist with people

Press Trust of India / Kathmandu September 04, 2012, 18:15

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Tigers in Nepal are taking night shifts in order to avoid their human neighbours and better coexist with them, a new study has found.

The big cats aren't known for being accommodating and generally move around at all times of the day and night, to monitor territory, mate and hunt.

However, the study of tigers in Chitwan National Park - where humans and tigers walk the same paths - showed a nocturnal shift in activity.

The revelation that tigers and people are sharing exactly the same space, the same roads and trails flies in the face of long-held convictions in conservation circles.

It also underscores how successful conservation efforts need sciences that takes into account both nature and humans.

"As our planet becomes more crowded, we need to find creative solutions that consider both human and natural systems," said Jianguo "Jack" Liu, the director of the Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability at Michigan State University.

"Sustainability can be achieved if we have a good understanding of the complicated connections between both worlds. We've found something very interesting is happening in Nepal that holds promise for both humans and nature to thrive," Liu said.

Conventional conservation wisdom is that tigers need plenty of people-free space, which often leads to people being relocated or their access to resources compromised to make way for tigers.

Neil Carter, MSU doctoral student and one of the paper's co-authors, spent two seasons setting motion-detecting camera traps. His analysis of the images shows that people and tigers are walking the same paths, albeit at different times.

In the study area, the tigers had become creatures of the night. People in Nepal generally avoid the forests at night. Essentially, quitting time for people signals starting time for Chitwan's tigers.

"It's a very fundamental conflict over resources. Tigers need resources, people need the same resources. If we operate under the traditional wisdom that tigers only can survive with space dedicated solely for them, there would always be conflict. If your priority is people, tigers lose out. If your priority is tigers, people lose out," Carter said.

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