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Humans And Tigers Learning To Live Together in Chitwan National Park, Nepal

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April Flowers for redOrbit.com – Your Universe Online

Tigers, though beautiful, do not have a reputation for being accommodating

sciences that take 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 (CSIS) 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, along with his PhD student Neil Carter, Binoj Shrestha of the Institute for Social and Environmental Research in Nepal, Jhamak Karki of Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Narendra Man Babu Pradhan of the World Wildlife Fund in Nepal wrote the study published in this week’s Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

Conventional conservation wisdom holds that tigers need a lot of people-free space. This often leads to people being relocated or their access to resources being severely limited to make way for the tigers.

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Chitwan National Park is the first national park in Nepal and was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1984. It covers about 360 square miles in the subtropical Inner Terai lowlands of south-central Nepal. It is home to more than 40 species of mammals, including the Bengal Tiger.

The park is one of the best tiger habitats in the world and since the park's establishment, the small "streak" of 25 tigers has increased to between 70 and 120. Considering the global population of tigers has fallen by a whopping 97% since the early 1900's to an estimated 3,000 individuals, this makes Chitwan National Park a vitally important resource.

Neil Carter spent two seasons setting up motion-detecting camera traps to track tigers, their prey, and the people who walk the roads and trails of Chitwan in and around the park.

People live on the park's borders, not the interior, but they rely on the forests for ecosystem services such as wood and grasses. Carter's cameras captured local people on the roads and dirt paths, and military patrols there to thwart poachers on the roads.

After analyzing thousands of images showing people and tigers walking the same paths at different times, Carter and his colleagues discovered that the tigers had become creatures of the night.

Tigers are typically crepuscular, or not strictly diurnal or nocturnal. They tend to move around at all hours of the day and night, monitoring their territory, mating and hunting. Carter's infrared camera shots document a pronounced shift toward nocturnal activity.

People in Nepal tend to avoid the forest at night, so quitting time for humans signals starting time for Chitwan's tiger population. So far, it appears that tiger numbers are holding steady despite an increase in the human population in the region.

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

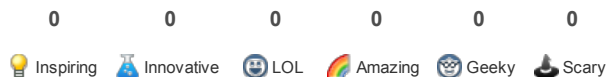
"Conditions for tigers in Chitwan are good," he continued. "Prey numbers are high, forests outside the park are regenerating, and poaching of tigers and their prey is relatively low. However, people of different stripes, including tourists and local residents, frequent the forests of Chitwan. Tigers need to use the same space as people if they are to have a viable long-term future. What we're learning in Chitwan is that tigers seem to be adapting to make it work."

Carter's cameras give us a rare look at people / tiger inter-activity.

"There appears to be a middle ground where you might actually be able to protect the species at high densities and give people access to forest goods they need to live," Carter said. "If that's the case, then this can happen in other places, and the future of tigers is much brighter than it would be otherwise."

Source: April Flowers for redOrbit.com - Your Universe Online

Topics: Environment, Bengal tiger, Asia, Tigers, Inner Terai Valleys of Nepal, Tandi, Chitwan District, Fauna of India, Chitwan National Park, Nepal, Neil Carter



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