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"Conflict to Coexistence: Human – Leopard Interactions in a Plantation Landscape in Anamalai Hills, India"

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When leopards are found in human-dominated landscapes, conflicts may arise due to attacks on people or livestock loss or when people retaliate following real and perceived threats. In the plantation landscape of the Valparai plateau, we studied incidents of injury and loss of life of people and livestock over time (15 – 25 y) and carried out questionnaire surveys in 29 plantation colonies and eight tribal villages to study correlates of livestock depredation, people's perception of leopards, and preferred management options for human – leopard interactions. Leopards were implicated in an average of 1.3 (± 0.4 SE) incidents/year (1990 – 2014) involving humans and 3.6 (± 0.8 SE) incidents/year (1999 – 2014) involving livestock, with no statistically significant increasing trend over time. Most incidents of injury or loss of life involved young children or unattended livestock, and occurred between afternoon and night. At the colony level, livestock depredation was positively related to the number of livestock, but decreased with the distance from protected area and number of residents. Half the respondents reported seeing a leopard in a neutral situation, under conditions that resulted in no harm. All tribal and 52% of estate respondents had neutral perceptions of leopards and most (81.9%, n = 161 respondents) indicated changing their own behaviour as a preferred option to manage negative interactions with leopards, rather than capture or removal of leopards. Perception was unrelated to livestock depredation, but tended to be more negative when human attacks had occurred in a colony. A combination of measures including safety precautions for adults and children at night, better livestock herding and cattle-sheds, and building on people's neutral perception and tolerance can mitigate negative interactions and support continued human – leopard coexistence. (Text from authors' abstract)

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