

Human Wildlife Coexistence HWCx Street Plays in THADAM villages of Tamil Nadu

Human-Wildlife Negative Interactions (HWNI) between humans and wild animals is a common issue around the world as human populations continue to expand into areas originally occupied by wildlife. This leads to habitat loss and fragmentation and force wildlife to live in closer proximity to human settlements. The consequence of negative interactions includes crop destruction, reduced agricultural productivity, competition for grazing lands and water supply, livestock predation, injury and death to human, damage to infrastructure, and increased risk of disease transmission among wildlife and livestock. There is no permanent solution for HWNI; it's possible to significantly reduce its negative impacts through effective management and a collaborative approach. This involves understanding the underlying causes, implementing integrated solutions, and involving local communities as active participants. By focusing on prevention, mitigation, and coexistence strategies, it's possible to create a more harmonious relationship between humans and wildlife. Tamil Nadu, like many other states in India, faces a range of HWNIs. Some of the common negative interactions in Tamil Nadu include Asian Elephant, Indian Leopard, Indian Tiger, Sloth Bear,

Gaur, and Wild Boar. According to Advanced Institute for Wildlife Conservation, Tamil Nadu report, from 2016 to 2021, 13,318 HWNI incidents were reported with the highest concentration in the Hosur division (4,408 incidents) followed by the Coimbatore division (1,996 incidents). Elephants emerged as a predominant contributor to negative interactions, closely followed by Wild Boar. An in-depth analysis exposed crop damage as the prevailing issue, outweighing human casualties and livestock predation.

The management of HWNI has prompted a range of strategies employed by both the forest department and local farmers. The existing measures encompass cloth fencing, solar fencing, elephant proof trenches, driveaway the problematic elephants using kumkis, early warning systems, establishment of new PA's, removal by capturing, translocation, compensation, and awareness programmes.

To make aware the community about elephant's behaviour, negative interactions, and coexistence,



Zooreach Activity Update

Zoo Outreach Organisation has been conducting awareness programmes on Human-Elephant Coexistence (HECx) since 2008 in most of the elephant range countries of South and Southeast Asia. The programme includes Teaching of Trainers (ToT) programmes, school awareness programmes, HECx awareness street plays for community people, sensitization programmes for journalists, line department staff and forest department staff.

As Tamil Nadu Forest Department is aware of our HECx programmes, recently one of their wings the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project for Climate Change Response (TBGPCCR) approached us to conduct 95 Human-Wildlife Coexistence Street plays in THADAM (Path) villages of nine forest divisions of Tamil Nadu. It is a community network involving various stakeholders including farmers, villagers, members of non-governmental organisations and field staff of the forest department where human-elephant negative interactions is common problem and to keep people informed about wild elephants that stray from forest and ensure their safety. Under the initiative each forest range has started a WhatsApp group to share information on the movement of elephants with the aim to avoid human casualties if provide real time information on the movement of elephants outside forests.

The objective of the Human-Wildlife Coexistence Street plays to educate the community living near the forest areas to improve their attitudes towards wild animals to avoid confrontation and negative interactions whenever possible. The method is to reach out to the THADAM village communities in HWNI areas and to create awareness on HWNI while promoting human-wildlife coexistence. Over the years, Zooreach has successfully tried a methodology to introduce and

teach about Human-Elephant Coexistence through street plays. This aims at reaching a wide range of audience from children to adult of both literate and non-literate audience who live in HENI areas. The approach is to conduct street plays in selected villages of conflict areas at different times to teach about wildlife conflict prevention and mitigation.

The villagers were approached through the successful method using street plays “Theru Nadagam” which is culturally associated with the Tamil communities. The Zooreach’s recent projects utilizing street play to reach out the local people to promote HECx has been successful and hence we adapted this method in this TBGPCCR project.

A team of professional street players has been identified already, and they were utilized in our previous projects. SWORD, an NGO located in Krishnagiri District of Tamil Nadu has a team of folklore artists called ‘Adhiyaman Kalaikuzhu’ who performed the street plays. The target groups are thoroughly informed through street plays about



HWNI and the need for HWCx. They were also be familiar with a variety of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ relative to wildlife interactions from an individual’s point of view of protect himself and his family from wild animals. This was practical advice for people who are



Zooreach Activity Update



மனித-வன விவகார முண்பாடு தெரு நாடகத்தில் விழிப்புணர்வு

மாலை மலர்... மனித-வன விவகார முண்பாடு தெரு நாடகத்தில் விழிப்புணர்வு... மனித-வன விவகார முண்பாடு தெரு நாடகத்தில் விழிப்புணர்வு...



actually in danger. The community is provided with a pamphlet which has detailed dos and don'ts in forest fringe areas.

The street plays were started on 24 February at Athinatham village of Urigam forest range of Hosur forest division and concluded at Vadākaunchi village of Perumpallam forest range of Kodaikanal forest division on 16 April 2025. It took 45 days and travelled up to 5500 kms to achieve the target.

The 95 street plays were held in nine forest divisions: Hosur (15 nos.), Dharmapuri (10 nos.), Sathyamangalam (10 nos.), Hasanur (10 nos.), Gudalur (17 nos.), Nilgiris (9 nos.), Coimbatore (16 nos.), Pollachi-ATR (6 nos.), and Kodaikanal (2 nos.). In these forest divisions, 44 forest ranges were covered: Urigam, Anchetty, Dhenkanikottai, Jawalagiri, Hosur, Royakottai, Krishnagiri (Hosur FD); Hogenakkal, Pennagaram, Palacode

(Dharmapuri FD); Vilamundi, Sathyamangalam, T.N. Palayam, Kadambur, Thalamalai, Bhavanisagar (Sathyamangalam FD); Jeerahalli, Thalavadi, Hasanur, Germalam (Hasanur FD); O' Valley, Gudalur, Pandalur, Nadugani, Cherambadi, Bithergadu (Gudalur FD); Kilkotagiri, Kattabettu, Kotagiri, Kundah, Coonoor, Udhagai North and Udhagai South (Nilgiris FD); Sirumugai, Mettupalayam, Karamadai, Periyanaickenpalayam, Coimbatore, Bolampatti, Madukarai (Coimbatore FD); Valparai, Manambolly (Pollachi ATR FD), and Palani, Perumpallam (Kodaikanal FD).

Through this programme we targeted about 10,000 community people living in ninety five (95) THADAM villages which falls under forty four (44) forest ranges of nine (9) forest divisions of Tamil Nadu.

Acknowledgements:

My deep appreciation goes to Mr. I. Anwardeen, IFS, PCCF & Project Director, TBGPCCR for the funding support. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Muhammed Shabab, IFS, CF (Wildlife) & Project Director (Biodiversity) TBGPCCR; Mr. Bakan Jagadish Sudhakar, IFS, Wildlife Warden, Hosur; Mr. K. Rajangam, IFS, District Forest Officer, Dharmapuri; Mr. Kulal Yogesh Vilas, IFS, Deputy Director, Sathyamangalam, STR; Mr. K. Sudhagar, IFS, Deputy Director, Hasanur, STR; Mr. N. Vengatesh Prabhu, IFS, District Forest Officer, Gudalur; Mr. S. Gowtham, IFS, District Forest Officer, Nilgiris; Mr. N. Jayaraj, IFS, District Forest Officer, Coimbatore; Mr. Devendra Kumar Meena, IFS, Deputy Director, ATR, Pollachi; Mr. Yogesh Kumar Meena, IFS, District Forest Officer / Wildlife Warden, Kodaikanal for their support. My thanks to all Assistant Conservator of Forests, Forest Range Officers, Foresters, Watchers, Guards and Anti-Poaching Watchers for their assistance in the field.



Rengasamy Marimuthu, Project Coordinator
Zoo Outreach Organisation
Email: marimuthu@zooreach.org