

Forest dept identifies 10 landscapes with high human-animal conflicts

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Kochi: Kerala forest department has identified 10 forest landscapes where man-animal conflicts are high. In the state, conflicts begin to surface after winter and peak when summer temperatures soar in March, April and May, resulting in both humans and wild animals being killed.

The department has identified the Aralam (comprising areas up to Taliparamba in Kannur and Kasaragod), Wayanad, Mannarkkad, Chalakudy-Malayattoor, Palakkad, Nilambur, Munnar, Ranni, Konni and Thiruvananthapuram landscapes.

It is envisaged to formulate conflict preventive measures —short-, medium- and long-term solutions— on how to rescue animals

that get trapped in human habitations, habitat management by identifying degradation and other challenges, and providing training to field staff. A specialized team will be constituted in each landscape for conflict prevention.

Training of master trainers, skilled in particular areas, is over. They will in turn train field staff at the circle level. Training is based on a prepared module. It reviews the tools required additionally for each existing rapid response team of the department. Once the training of forest staff is over, officials from other concerned departments like LSGD and agriculture will be trained through the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA). People's representatives will be sensitized by KILA in this regard.

"In Wayanad, the conflict is when humans, tigers and elephants encounter each other. In Kottiyoor, locals place snares to trap wild animals and tigers get trapped in them. In Chalakudy, the conflict is due to the 24km-long trench constructed by HML plantation authorities to prevent elephants from entering their area. It is the stopover route for elephants. The estate authorities prevented the free movement of elephants, leading to conflict there. In the Palakkad landscape, male elephants are involved in crop raiding. Thus in each landscape, the conflict is different, warranting a different approach. We must equip field staff based on that. The rapid response team (RRT) in Wayanad is highly efficient and professional, and we need to equip other RRTs to the same level," said a forest official.

Kerala is witnessing increasing conflicts due to various factors, including forest degradation and provoking of wild animals. They sometimes lead to violent situations like the one in Mananthavady, where resort mafia allegedly masquerading as farmers aggravated the situation early this year.

The state reported 6,662 conflict incidents, including those due to snake bites, in 2019-20. It rose to 8,076 incidents by 2021-22. The forest department admitted that the rising conflict is due to the expansion of agricultural activities near forests, a shift in cropping patterns, fragmentation of forest land and other factors.