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# Man-leopard conflict: Maharashtra panel suggests co-existence with animals, ties with locals

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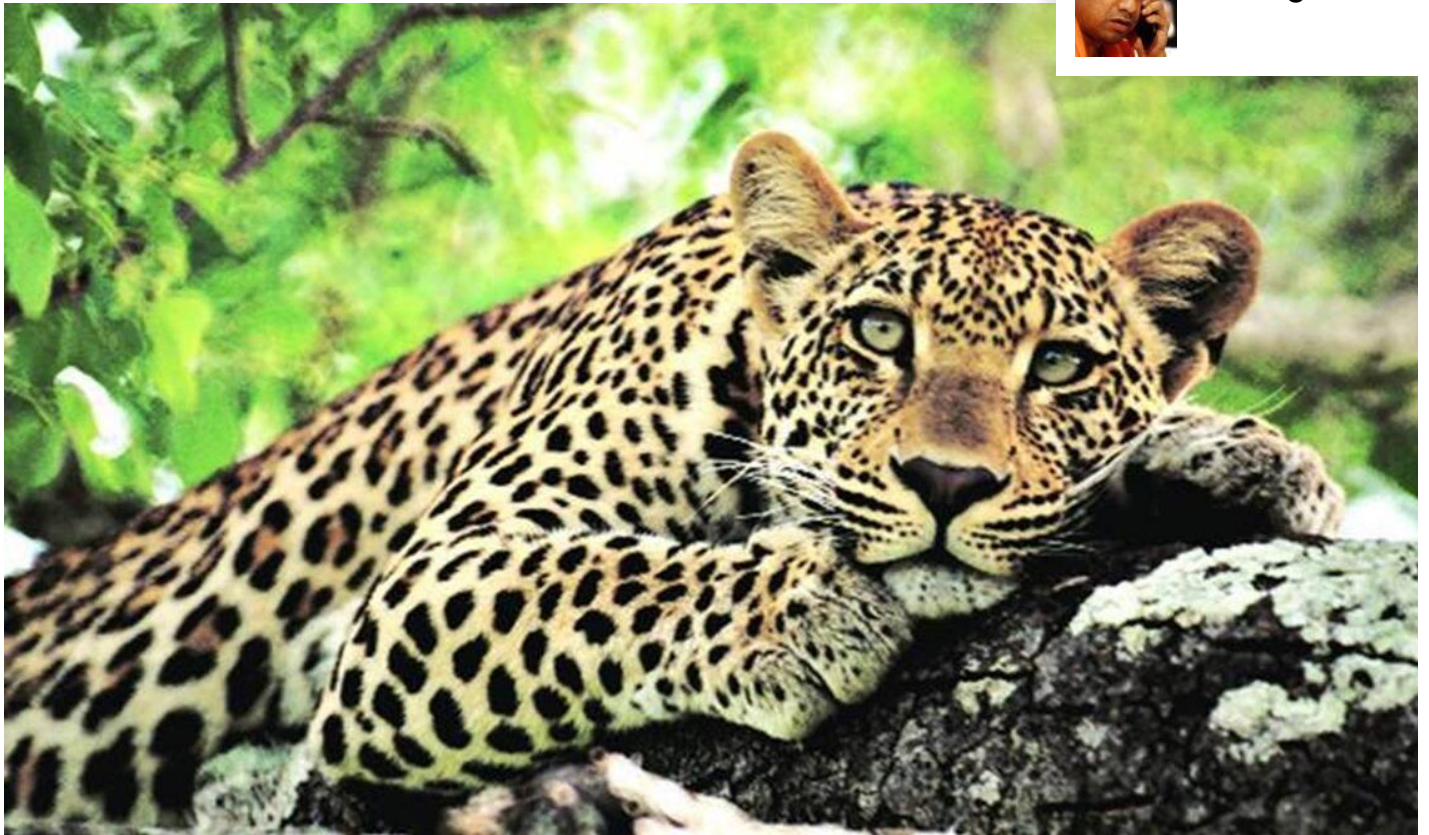
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Written by **Sanjana Bhalerao** | Mumbai |  
August 26, 2021 10:43:15 pm

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From 110 leopard deaths in 2019, the number rose to 172 in 2020, a rise of 57 per cent. (File Photo)

An 11-member committee, set up by the state government in January to study leopard-human conflict, has re-stated the importance of co-existence with the big cats and focus on engagement with locals.

The committee has rejected suggestions of capturing or trans-locating leopards from the conflict zone besides suggesting a “Living with Leopards” (LwL) programme.

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LwL has been successfully implemented in Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Akola, and in 2000, in Junnar, a town in Pune district.

“Leopard is an opportunistic animal. They move out, go to nearby villages in search of easy prey. One has to understand that their presence doesn't mean that they attack humans and also, we cannot go about trapping these animals. Instead, we have to start understanding how to live with the animals. People will have to co-exist with them,” said Sunil Limaye, principal chief conservator of forests, and a member of the committee.

From 110 leopard deaths in 2019, the number rose to 172 in 2020, a rise of 57 per cent. A three-fold increase in loss of human life was also recorded due to leopard attacks. While eight people died in man-animal conflict in 2019, the number went up to 23 till November 2020. Total 37 leopards were rescued last year.

Under the LwL programme, villagers will be educated about ways to co-exist with the animals. such as not to tie the cattle or dogs outside home or visit farms at

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Suggestions for capacity building of the forest department were also included in proposal.

“There has to be pro-active management. Working with villagers beforehand provides better results. Also, we have suggested a response team with locals to a forest department response team. In case of an injured animal and attack, the primary response team will come to the picture first, alert and coordinate with the forest department and other agencies,” said Vidya Athreya, committee member and director, the Wildlife Conservation Society-India.

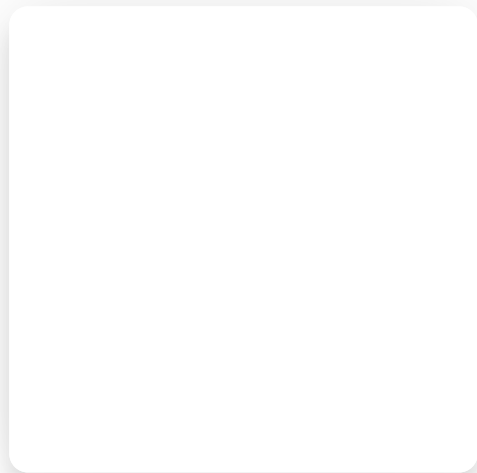
Released last month, the updated ‘Status of Leopard- 2018’ report found that of 1,690 leopards in Maharashtra, 65 per cent population stays outside the protected areas viz. sanctuaries, national parks, and tiger reserves.

Leopards are adaptable big cats and are known to thrive in urban landscapes, in sugarcane fields and other agricultural fields having prey like wild boars, dogs and cattle.

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The study by Athreya and her colleagues in 2000 in Junnar had revealed that the translocation increased leopard attacks on people in the vicinity of the release. In the three-year translocation period from 2001 to 2003, leopard attacks were 10 per year from an average of 4 per year for the eight-year period before the translocation began.

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As per the 2011 Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change guidelines on human-leopard conflict management, the decision to capture an animal should be the last option, and animals trapped after deliberate attacks on humans should never be released back into the wild. The translocated leopards have been documented to traverse back a distance of over 100km to return to their home territory.

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