

## TIGER-HUMAN CONFLICT- ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: **43 human deaths due to tiger attacks** in Jan–June 2025 alone — consistent with 2024 trends.

- Notable clusters:
  - **Chandrapur (Maharashtra)**: 22 deaths (11 in 17 days in May)
  - Pilibhit (UP): 5 deaths
  - Uttarakhand: 9 deaths
  - **Ranthambore (Rajasthan)**: 3 deaths, incl. forest staff
- Pattern: Most attacks occurred within 100–500m of forest fringes, often in tiger corridors and buffer zones.

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

### Recent Incidents & Observations

- In at least **four recent cases**, **partial consumption of human remains** by tigers was observed.
- However, **experts caution against interpreting these incidents** as a sign that tigers are becoming **habitual human-eaters**.
- Such instances are often the result of **opportunistic scavenging**, especially when **human carcasses are left unattended** for extended periods.

### Why Tigers May Occasionally Attack or Scavenge Humans

- **Old, injured, or diseased tigers** may attack humans as they **lose the ability to hunt natural prey** such as deer or wild boars.
- **Orphaned cubs or tigers raised near human settlements** may associate humans with food—particularly if they are **fed by forest staff or tourists**.
- **Scavenging behaviour** may also emerge when rescue or search operations are **delayed**, giving the tiger time to return to the scene.

### Expert Views on Human-Eating Behaviour

- **Anish Andheria (Wildlife Conservation Trust)**: True habitual human-eating by tigers is **extremely rare** and mostly confined to specific individuals.
- **Krishnendu Basak (Biologist)**:

- A healthy tiger requires about **50 kills per year**, which equates to needing around **500 prey animals** annually.
- If tigers preferred humans, the **number of deaths would be in the thousands**, not just a few dozen.
- **Ullas Karanth (Wildlife Biologist):**
  - The issue is **not about a “taste for human flesh”**, but rather the **loss of fear of humans** due to **frequent human interaction**.

## Ecological & Behavioural Factors Contributing to Conflict

### a. Reduced Natural Prey Base

- In some tiger reserves, **habitat degradation, poaching, and competition from livestock** have led to a **decline in herbivore populations**.
- This **forces tigers to venture closer to human settlements** in search of food.

### b. Habituation to Humans

- Practices like **live baiting** (e.g., using goats or cattle as bait to attract tigers for tourists or cameras) can condition tigers to **associate humans with easy food**.
- Example: The **Arrowhead tigress in Ranthambore**, frequently baited, raised cubs that became **less fearful of humans**.

### c. Impaired or Orphaned Tigers

- Example: **Arrowhead suffered from bone cancer**, impairing her hunting ability.
- Her cubs, exposed to her unnatural feeding habits, may **mimic this behaviour**, including approaching human settlements for food.

### d. Expansion of Tiger Habitat into Human Zones

- A 2025 study in *Science* journal reports:
  - About **45% of tiger-occupied areas** now **overlap with human-dominated landscapes** (~60 million people).
  - Tiger range in India has expanded by **approximately 138,200 sq km** over the past two decades, increasing potential contact with humans.

## Human-Induced Factors Increasing Conflict Risk

### a. Encroachment and Agriculture

- Expansion of agriculture (e.g., **sugarcane fields**) into buffer zones around tiger reserves **narrows the boundary** between tigers and people.

#### **b. Forest-Based Livelihoods**

- Locals often enter forests for **firewood collection, cattle grazing, or non-timber forest products**, unknowingly entering **tiger territory**.

#### **c. Delayed Rescue or Search Operations**

- If search operations after a human-tiger encounter are delayed, **tigers may scavenge the body or return to the site**, reinforcing problematic behaviour.

### **Conservation Policy Challenges**

#### **a. The Conservation Paradox**

- India's success in **increasing the tiger population** has also **increased the frequency of human-tiger interactions**.
- Many buffer zones are **poorly enforced or inadequately managed**, leading to **blurred boundaries** between human and wildlife spaces.

#### **b. Lack of Public Awareness**

- Many locals are **unaware of tiger behaviour**, migration patterns, or **safe practices** while working near forests.
- This leads to **unintentional risky encounters**, especially at dawn or dusk.

### **Policy Recommendations to Mitigate Conflict**

#### **a. Scientific Management of Prey Base**

- Ensure **adequate populations of herbivores** (e.g., deer, wild boar) within reserves through habitat restoration and protection.
- **Discourage cattle grazing** in tiger zones to reduce **competition for food and avoid conflict** over livestock kills.

#### **b. Ban or Regulate Live Baiting**

- Prohibit or strictly control the use of **live animals as bait**, as it can lead to **long-term behavioural distortions** in tiger cubs.

#### **c. Enhanced Surveillance and Early Warning Systems**

- Deploy **camera traps, AI-powered alert systems, and drones** to detect tiger movement near human habitations in real time.

- Warn locals in advance through **SMS alerts or public address systems**.

#### **d. Community-Based Conflict Management**

- Train and involve **local communities** (e.g., **Van Rakshaks**, SHGs) in:
  - Tiger tracking
  - First response and rescue
  - Compensation processing
  - Spreading awareness about safety protocols

#### **e. Promote Safe and Sustainable Livelihoods**

- Reduce people's dependency on forests by promoting:
  - **Clean energy** (like LPG, solar cookers)
  - **Agroforestry and eco-tourism**
  - **Alternative income schemes** in fringe villages

#### **Conclusion**

- There is **no large-scale behavioural shift** indicating that tigers are turning into habitual human predators.
- However, **a combination of ecological stress, human encroachment, and management failures** is increasing the frequency of conflicts.
- A **balanced, community-inclusive, and ecologically sound policy response** is essential to protect both **human lives and tiger conservation gains**.