

Anthropogenic Mortality of Wildlife: A Case Study

Demonstrating Free Ranging Dogs Emerging as the only Predator in Thar Desert

Based on the catalogue data of Jodhpur wildlife rescue center it was observed that rescuing injured wild animals especially small antelopes is inefficient practice. Among the different factors responsible for injuring wild animals in the region, stray dog has been observed as a main factor responsible for their injury and mortality. Status survey of antelopes in whole Thar region using latest techniques, attempting possibilities of mobile rescue platforms, establishing rescue centers at field level to avoid trauma to wild animals, dealing with populations of dogs is needed and maximizing urban forestry programs to maintain escape habitats for wildlife are suggested.

Key words: Thar Desert wildlife mortality stray dog rescue.

Introduction

Anthropogenic activities leave an irreversible damage to the ecosystem and especially on the native species. Many significant immediate and long-term threats, including habitat loss, infectious disease, and non-native species have been studied worldwide, among them free ranging dogs were ranked high (Hughes and Macdonald, 2013). Domestic dogs have negative impact on wildlife through direct predation, fear-mediated behavioural changes, direct food competition, hybridisation and disease transmission (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014; Banks and Bryant, 2007; Zapata-Rios and Branch, 2016; Vanak *et al.*, 2014; Bassi *et al.*, 2017; Bergman and Bender, 2009; Furtado *et al.*, 2016; Doherty *et al.*, 2017). Domestic dogs have contributed to 11 vertebrate extinctions and are a known or potential threat to 188 threatened species worldwide (Doherty *et al.*, 2017).

Rural environments are where dog-wildlife interactions are most likely to occur. However, not all rural dogs are similar, but almost all dog populations are highly dependent on human-provided food, in other words, they are subsidized by humans (Vanak, 2008). The World Health Organization estimates that India alone is home to more than 25-30 million domestic dogs, which makes a matter of serious concern, as even such high numbers of dogs include even a small amount of wildlife in their diet, collectively they can have a serious impact. In India, now a day, dogs are sharing habitat with almost all wildlife, and few of them are critically endangered. There have been unconfirmed reports that dogs are consuming eggs of ground nesting birds and even if a domestic dog were to eat just one egg or chick of the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigricaps* in its breeding range, can leave a highly negative impact on the breeding success of this critically endangered bird (Vanak, 2008).

Since ages, western Rajasthan has set emulative example of wildlife conservation by local communities. The saga of Amrita Devi and dedication of *Bishnoi* community towards protecting the wildlife of Marwar region is well known all over the world. Due to a high sensitivity of the *Bishnoi* community towards wildlife protection and their intolerance of wildlife crime, there are few and occasional incidences of wildlife poaching in the region. It was believed that there is only one prima facie culprit for wildlife crime; humans. The present study highlights that free ranging dogs are a major

While observing the increasing trend in wildlife mortality in Thar desert with free ranging dogs as one of the major factor, the present study suggests developing rescue centers at field level, dealing with such dogs and maximizing urban forestry programs to maintain escape refuges for the wildlife.

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