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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

When the Forest Comes to the Village

DOWN TO EARTH

15 June 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · SOCIAL ISSUES · GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY



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When the Forest Comes to the Village

 **Down to Earth** 15 June 2026 **GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"We celebrate rising tiger and leopard numbers, but the people who live beside forests pay the price in lost crops, livestock and lives. How do we make conservation fair to the communities that bear its cost?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  **Down to Earth**

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** **HOW**

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Rising **human-wildlife conflict** in Uttarakhand's hills, leopards and elephants entering settlements, has put the spotlight on a conservation model that protects animals inside parks while forest-edge communities bear the cost. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **biodiversity conservation, habitat fragmentation and the social justice of conservation**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Rising **human-wildlife conflict** in Uttarakhand reflects **shrinking, fragmented habitats** and a model that raises wildlife numbers inside parks while **forest-edge communities** lose crops, livestock and lives. Compensation is often slow. The deeper issue is distributive: the costs of conservation fall on the poor, the benefits are diffuse. The fix lies in **corridors, coexistence and fair compensation**.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

| CONCEPT | WHAT IT MEANS | WHY IT MATTERS |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Habitat fragmentation | Corridors broken by roads, settlements | Pushes wildlife into villages |
| Conflict | Wildlife harming people, crops, livestock | The human cost of conservation |
| Distributive injustice | Costs on the poor, benefits diffuse | The social-justice dimension |
| Coexistence measures | Early warning, barriers, compensation | The path to durable conservation |

THE ANALYSIS: WHO PAYS FOR CONSERVATION

- ❶ **Structural drivers.** Habitat loss and fragmented corridors push wildlife into human spaces.
- ❷ **The cost falls on the poor.** Forest-edge communities bear lost crops, livestock and lives.
- ❸ **Weak compensation.** Slow, inadequate compensation erodes local support for conservation.
- ❹ **Beyond enforcement.** Barriers and capture alone cannot solve a structural, distributive problem.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; Project Tiger and Project Elephant; the role of state forest departments. The concept: wildlife corridors; protected areas (national parks, sanctuaries); coexistence; ecosystem services. The institutions: the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA); state wildlife boards; compensation schemes for crop and livestock loss. Concept: distributive justice in conservation; community-based conservation.

THE DEBATE

Argument that conflict is a social-justice issue: The costs of conservation fall on poor forest-edge communities while benefits are diffuse; conservation must share benefits and compensate fairly.

Argument that it is a manageable side effect: Rising wildlife numbers are a conservation success; conflict can be managed through enforcement, barriers and better capture protocols.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT IT

Frame the answer around conservation as **both ecology and justice**. Use Uttarakhand to show how habitat fragmentation drives conflict, then argue that durable conservation must **share benefits and compensate communities fairly**, not just enforce protection. Avoid framing wildlife and people as simple opponents.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a protected forest as an island, shrinking as the sea of roads and settlements rises around it. The animals have nowhere to go but into the villages on the shore. The villagers, not the distant beneficiaries of conservation, are the ones who meet the leopard at the door.

PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC has asked about human-wildlife conflict, conservation and the rights of forest communities. This editorial connects those to the distributive justice of conservation in the hills.

THE ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

Human-wildlife conflict is a question of justice as much as ecology; conservation that shares its benefits with forest-edge communities, not only its costs, is the only kind that lasts.

Source: When the Forest Comes to the Village — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Rising human-wildlife conflict in Uttarakhand's hills, with attacks by leopards, elephants and other wildlife on people, livestock and crops, reflects shrinking and fragmented habitats and a conservation model that protects animals inside parks while leaving forest-edge communities to bear the cost, making conflict a question of social justice as much as ecology.

✓ SUPPORTING

- Habitat loss, fragmented corridors and human encroachment push wildlife into human settlements, raising the frequency of conflict.

- The cost of conservation falls disproportionately on poor, forest-edge communities through lost crops, livestock and lives, while the benefits are diffuse.
- Compensation systems are often slow and inadequate, eroding local support for conservation.


COUNTER

Some argue that strict protection and rising wildlife numbers are conservation successes, and that conflict is a manageable side effect to be addressed through better enforcement and barriers.


WAY FORWARD

Restore and connect habitat corridors, invest in early-warning and coexistence measures, make compensation prompt and fair, and involve local communities so conservation shares its benefits as well as its costs.


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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

"Human-wildlife conflict is as much a question of social justice as of conservation." Examine with reference to India's hill states. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

A leopard in a village is not only a wildlife story. It is a story about who pays for conservation, and in India's hills, the answer is too often the poorest.

BODY

Uttarakhand's hill districts have seen rising human-wildlife conflict, with leopards, elephants and other wildlife increasingly entering human settlements, attacking livestock, damaging crops and sometimes killing people. The drivers are structural.

Habitat loss and the fragmentation of wildlife corridors, by roads, settlements and changing land use,

push animals into human spaces, while declining prey and degraded forests draw predators toward easier targets. The deeper issue is distributive.

India's conservation model has succeeded in raising the numbers of charismatic species inside protected areas, a genuine achievement, but the cost of living alongside those animals falls on forest-edge communities, who are often poor and politically marginal. They lose crops, livestock and occasionally family members, while the benefits of conservation, biodiversity, ecosystem services, national pride, are diffuse and national.

Compensation, where it exists, is frequently slow and inadequate, eroding the very local support conservation depends on. Treating conflict only as an enforcement problem, more barriers, more capture, misses this.

The way forward is to restore and connect habitat corridors so animals have room, to invest in early-warning systems and coexistence measures, to make compensation prompt and fair, and to involve communities so that conservation shares its benefits as well as its burdens. Conservation that ignores the people at its edges will eventually lose them.

CONCLUSION

Human-wildlife conflict is a question of social justice as much as ecology. Conservation must share its benefits with forest-edge communities, not only its costs, if it is to endure.

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