

HUMAN- ELEPHANT CONFLICT

Prelims: Environment- Biodiversity

Mains: GS-III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context:

► Tension has gripped several villages in the western belt of Chittoor district, from Palamaner to Somalia, with wild elephants raiding crops and damaging huts.

Recent Issue:

- In the latest incident last week, a group of three elephants attacked a hut in Madhavaram village of Tavanampalle mandal.
- In June, three elephants again left the sanctuary to forage in the hillocks surrounding Punganur and Madanapalle forest ranges, raiding crops at nearby field at night and retreating into the valleys and thickets by day.
- More recently, in the third week of July, a tenmember herd left the Koundinya and marched as far as Somalia mandal located very close to the Seshachalam hills on the eastern side of Chittoor district.
- The herd raided crops in several villages, even as forest offi

Reason for Conflict:

Elephant-human conflict is a result of habitat loss and fragmentation:

- When elephants and humans interact, there is conflict from crop raiding, injuries and deaths to humans caused by elephants, and elephants being killed by humans for reasons other than ivory and habitat degradation.
- Elephants cause damage amounting from a few thousand dollars to millions of dollars. Every year, 100 humans (in some years it may be 300 people) and 40-50 elephants are killed during crop raiding in India.

Lethal Retaliation AGAINST Elephants:

- Such encounters foster resentment against the elephants amongst the human population and this can result in elephants being viewed as a nuisance and killed.
- This was illustrated in the case of >60 elephants found dead in retaliation incidents in NE India and Sumatra in 2001, poisoned by plantation workers.

- Human-elephant conflict can take their toll both on human lives and property as well as elephant populations.
- Ways of reducing or resolving such conflicts are vital for the viable conservation of Asian elephants.

Elephants across Asia live in a variety of habitats and landscapes:

- These include large contiguous areas surrounded by crop fields, or in highly degraded areas with other agricultural encroachments and they are also found in fragmented landscapes with a mosaic of crop fields, plantations and patches of forest.

Crop-Raiders:

- The pattern of crop raiding and the immediate reasons that induce elephants to raid crops vary. Elephants may prefer feeding on crops when compared to wild forage because of their higher nutritive content and palatability.
- However, latest studies on Asian elephants living in contiguous compact habitats show that not all elephants in a population raid crops. However, in highly fragmented landscapes, the entire population may be involved in elephant-human conflict.

