

LEOPARDS IN HUMAN-DOMINATED AREAS:
A SPILLOVER FROM SUSTAINED TRANSLOCATIONS INTO NEARBY FORESTS?¹

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In the past decade, many Indian states have reported an increase in Leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) populations outside forests, in certain areas, accompanied by a large number of attacks on people. This high density was attributed to declining natural habitats and prey species, and the increased survival of Leopards in croplands where they preyed on tamed, as well as feral domestic animals. That Leopard cubs were frequently found in agricultural fields was thought to also indicate rising Leopard populations. We use data from our human-leopard conflict study in Junnar, Maharashtra, along with information from three other conflict sites in India, to propose that the reason for this increase in Leopard population and conflict is related to the sustained translocation of 'problem' Leopards into nearby forests. That sustained releases could lead to population increases was never considered before, even though translocation is known to be a procedure for increasing populations of species at or close to the site of release. Although scientists do not recommend translocation as a management strategy for 'problem' carnivores, it is currently the legally recommended method of dealing with 'problem' large cats in India. Such faulty policies will only further hamper the conservation of this species, which is hunted in large numbers for illegal wildlife trade.

Keywords: translocation, *Panthera pardus fusca*, conflict, population increase, India