

# Gaur-human conflicts on the rise

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An Indian gaur in a tea estate near Udhagamandalam. File picture | Photo Credit: M. Sathvamoorthy

## **Decision likely after studying its likely impact on the buffer zone**

With the Indian gaur population increasing around the tourist towns of Udhagamandalam, Coonoor, Kotagiri and Gudalur, human-animal conflicts are recurring, prompting the Forest department and NGOs plan a detailed study to address the situation.

According to department officials, four people were killed and eight others suffered injuries during conflicts with Indian gaur in the Nilgiris North Division alone since last September.

A majority of them occurred in and around Coonoor Town, with the most well know run-in occurring at the popular Sims Park, where a young couple was gored by an animal when they tried to get too close to it take selfies in October.

Following the incident, the department has been pro-active in spreading awareness among tourists about the dangers of getting too close to large

herbivores. In the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR), a prominent signage has been placed warning visitors against taking selfies or photographs of animals. In the Nilgiris North Forest Division, awareness campaigns have been conducted in many places where humans share the landscape with the Indian Gaur.

S Kalanidhi, District Forest Officer (Nilgiris North Division), told *The Hindu* that there has been a dramatic rise in the Indian gaur population as well as an increase in the human population in the habitats nearby. However, all the reported deaths and injuries have been either accidental or caused due to callousness of humans.

Speaking of the incident at Kolakombai in Coonoor on Saturday, the DFO said the animal was only trying to flee after being chased from a tea estate when it came upon a group of people, including the deceased, Radhakrishnan, who was gored to death.

However, with attitude of the locals towards the Indian gaur and the Forest Department changing, Mr. Kalanidhi said there was serious consideration of mass translocation of the gaurs. However, only a few problematic animals or herds living too close to human habitations to the Sigur plateau might be moved.

A decision will be arrived at only after detailed discussions with environmental groups and after studying the effects the translocation would have on the buffer zone of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

Environmentalists said conflicts between gaur and humans would only intensify, as the lack of natural predators that hunt the animal in the upper slopes of the Nilgiris, especially around towns, leads to increase in the number of the animal. But they point out that translocation is not feasible, as introducing large herbivores to the extremely sensitive Sigur plateau could have even more serious consequences on the local wildlife and put an even greater strain on the resources available to the wildlife there, which already have to compete with cattle and livestock herds to get enough fodder from the forests during summer.

Founder director of Keystone Foundation, Pratim Roy, concedes that the gaur population has multiplied over the last 7-10 years, but said translocation of the animals was not a feasible solution.

### **Behavioural difference**

“What we have noticed is that there is a huge behavioural difference between the Indian gaur that live in urban landscapes, like those that in and around the towns of Udhagamandalam and Coonoor, and the animals that inhabit the

MTR. The gaurs in towns are acclimatised to people, cars and buildings, and are unfazed by human activity. These animals have very little chance of surviving in a completely wild habitat if trans-located,” he said.

Instead, it is imperative that people learn to live with the gaur.