



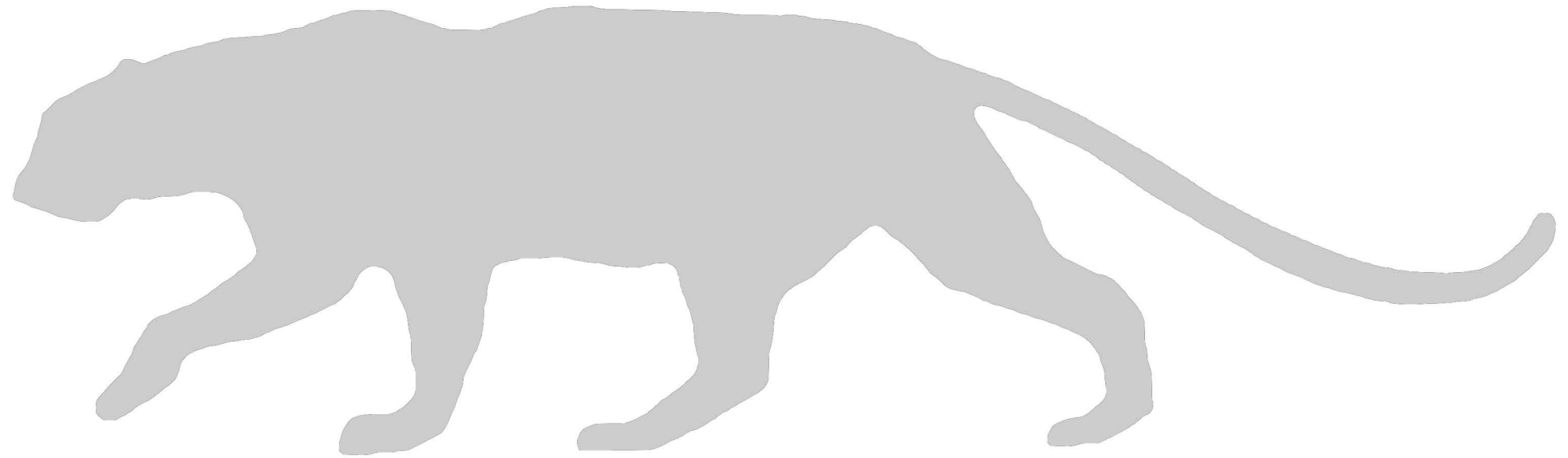
BUSTING MYTHS ABOUT LEOPARDS

AND LEARNING TO LIVE WITH THEM

INTRODUCTION



This booklet “Busting Myths about Leopards and learning to live with them” has been produced to support an awareness program amongst various stakeholders who are affected by the leopard conflict in Uttarakhand-local community, forest department, police and media. The booklet aims to spread awareness to understand the leopard better, separate myths from reality about the leopard conflict and finally, examines what we can do to live safely amongst leopards.



LEOPARD BEHAVIOUR AND BIOLOGY



THE LEOPARD HAS A VERY VARIED DIET: RODENTS, BIRDS, REPTILES, PIGS AND DOMESTIC DOGS
HUMANS ARE NOT ITS PREY, BUT ARE ITS PREDATORS



THE LEOPARD BELONGS TO THE CAT FAMILY



THE LEOPARD IS A NOCTURNAL ANIMAL IN HUMAN USE AREAS.
THEY HUNT BY NIGHT WHILE RESTING MOST OF THE DAY.



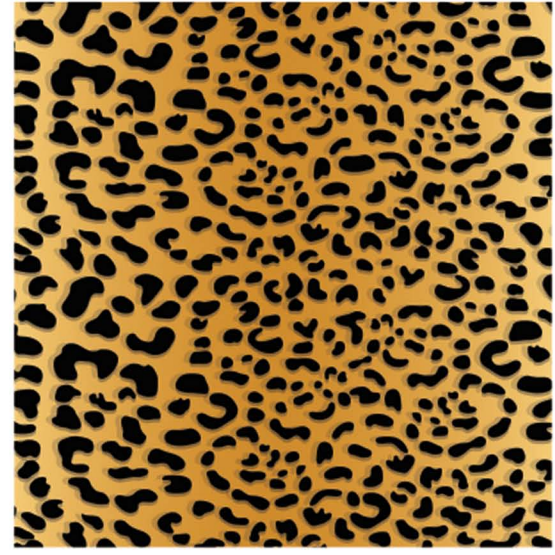
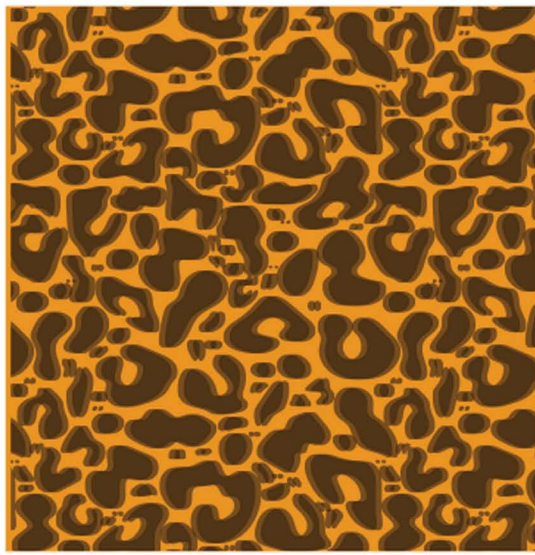
LEOPARDS CAN LIVE IN THE WILD FOR 12 OR SO YEARS



LEOPARDS HAVE STRONG SOCIAL BONDS.
CUBS STAY WITH THE MOTHER FOR THE FIRST 2 - 2.5 YEARS.



THE LEOPARD IS A TERRITORIAL ANIMAL WITH SIZE OF TERRITORY DEPENDING ON THE FOOD RESOURCES PRESENT. MORE FOOD, LESS TERRITORY.



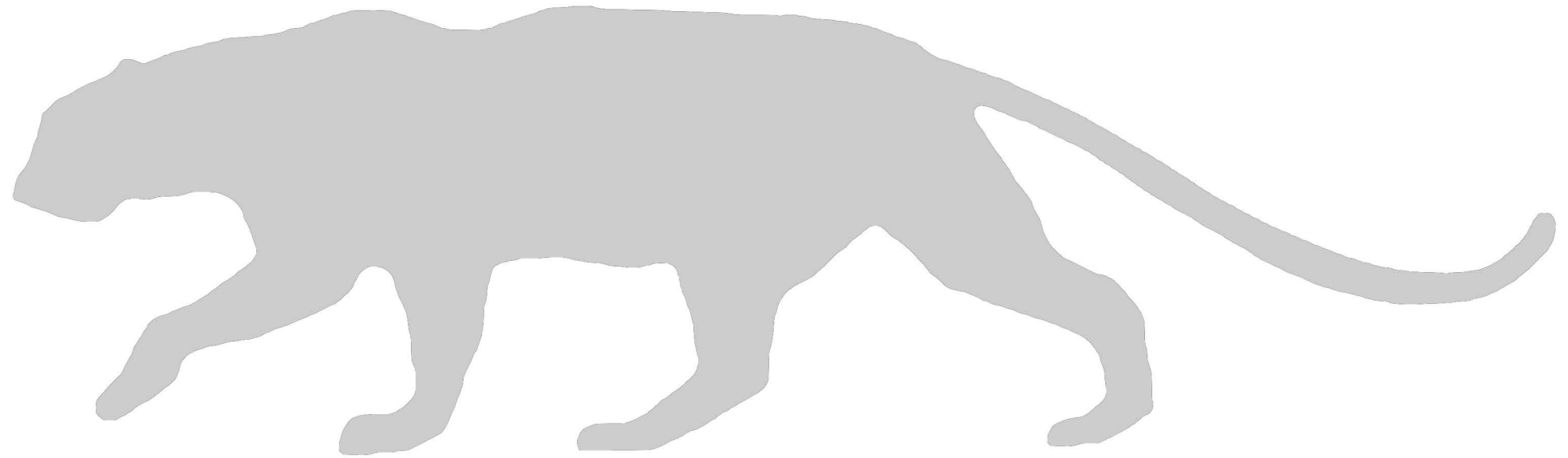
EACH LEOPARD HAS A DIFFERENT ROSETTE PATTERN



LEOPARDS ARE THE MOST ADAPTIVE OF THE LARGE WILD CATS.
THEY CAN STAY IN THE FOREST AS WELL AS VERY CLOSE TO HUMAN HABITAT.



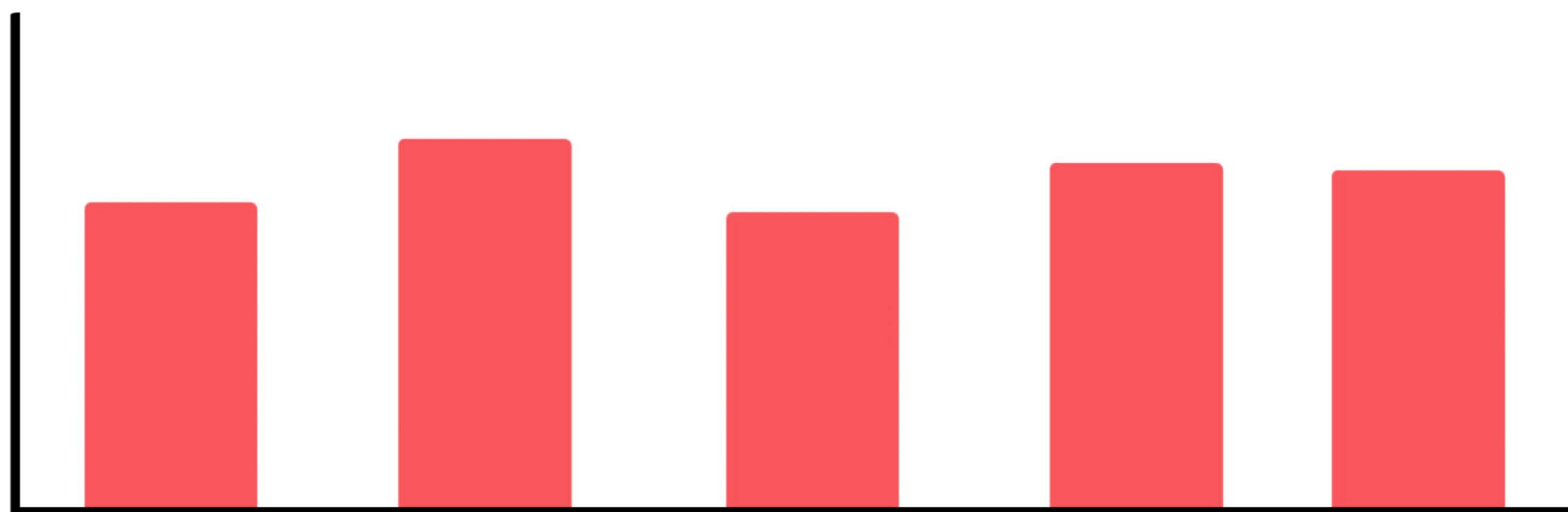
LEOPARDS ARE EXTREMELY SCARED OF PEOPLE, LIKE ALL OTHER WILD ANIMALS.



MYTHS VERSUS REALITY

MYTH

LEOPARD-HUMAN CONFLICT IN UTTARAKHAND IS ON THE INCREASE



LEOPARD ATTACKS ON HUMANS FROM 1998-2014



REALITY

The annual average of leopard attacks on humans in the period 1998-2014 is 60.

42% of villagers & 70% of stakeholders believed that human attacks by leopard have increased.

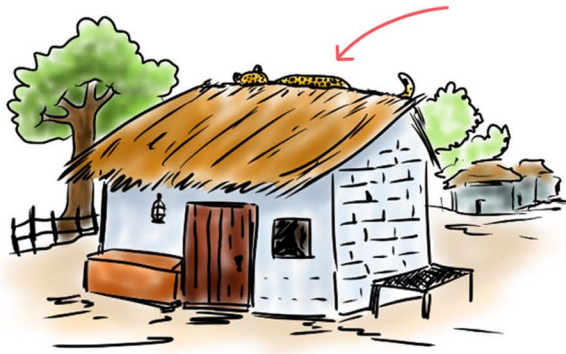
However, there is no trend of increase or decrease of attacks.

Highest human attacks by leopards are in the following Forest Divisions: Garhwal, Tehri, Pithoragarh & Almora. 50% of attacks are outdoors. 83% of villages that experienced leopard attacks on humans had 1 or 2 attacks in a 5-year period.

Significant increase in feral cattle & abandoned fields in the last five years.

MYTH

LEOPARDS LIVE ONLY IN FORESTS



REALITY

Leopards are very adaptable cats that live inside and outside forests.

They do not recognise man made boundaries of national parks or sanctuaries and will go where there is habitat and food.

MYTH

HABITAT DEGRADATION AND WILD PREY DECLINE ARE THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF LEOPARD CONFLICT



REALITY

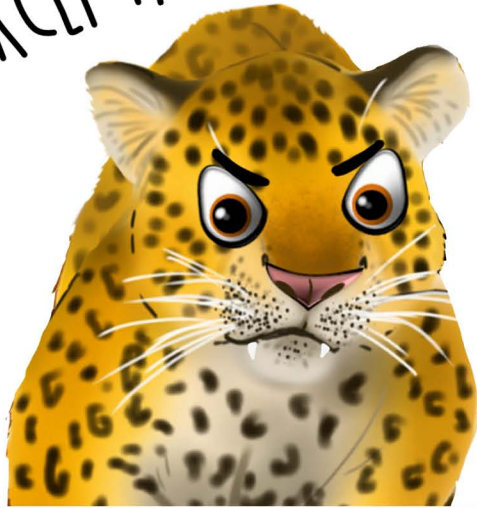
There are many places in Uttarakhand with similar habitat to that in Tehri and Pauri, with no or low leopard conflict.

Leopards feed on both wild and domestic prey. They will feed on what is easy to catch. Wild prey is much harder to hunt than domestic prey.

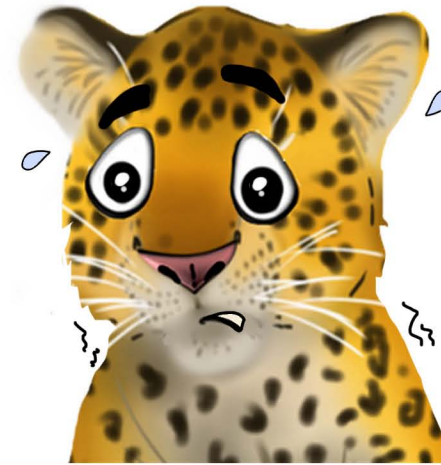
MYTH

ONCE A LEOPARD HAS TASTED HUMAN FLESH, IT BECOMES A MAN-EATER AND PREYS ONLY ON HUMANS.

PERCEPTION



REALITY



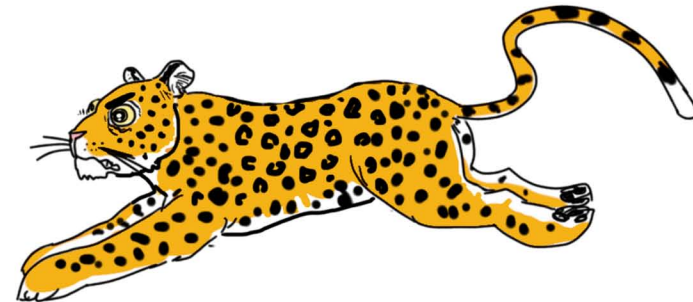
REALITY

There is no scientific evidence to support this. We believe that when a leopard becomes old or injured, then it might prey on humans, if it is unable to hunt wild prey or livestock. However, young leopards have attacked people; while, many old leopards exist that don't attack people.

Everything we do state or believe is only unproved theory.

MYTH

WE KNOW WHY LEOPARDS ATTACK HUMANS



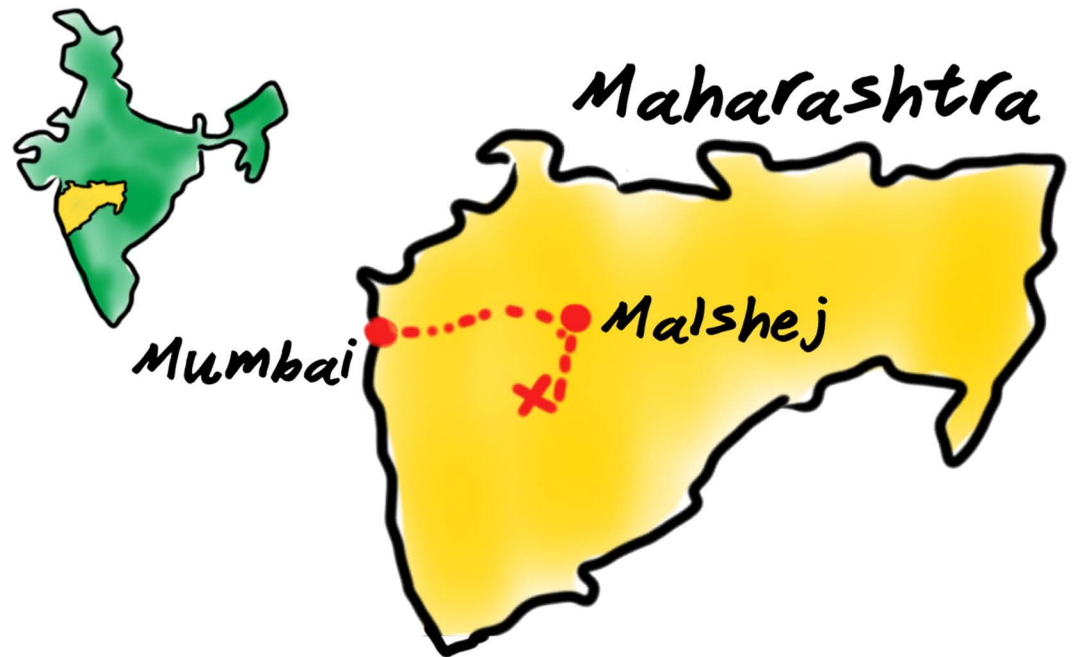
REALITY

We really do not know why leopards attack humans. Many theories exist- an old leopard may become a man-eater; a leopard will attack people who are sitting, not standing; injured leopards kill people; a human surprised the leopard resulting in an accidental death (very unlikely, as the leopard invariably knows a human is close by) and so on.

There is no scientific evidence for us to conclude that any of these are correct.

MYTH

TRANSLOCATION OF LEOPARDS SOLVES LOCAL PROBLEMS



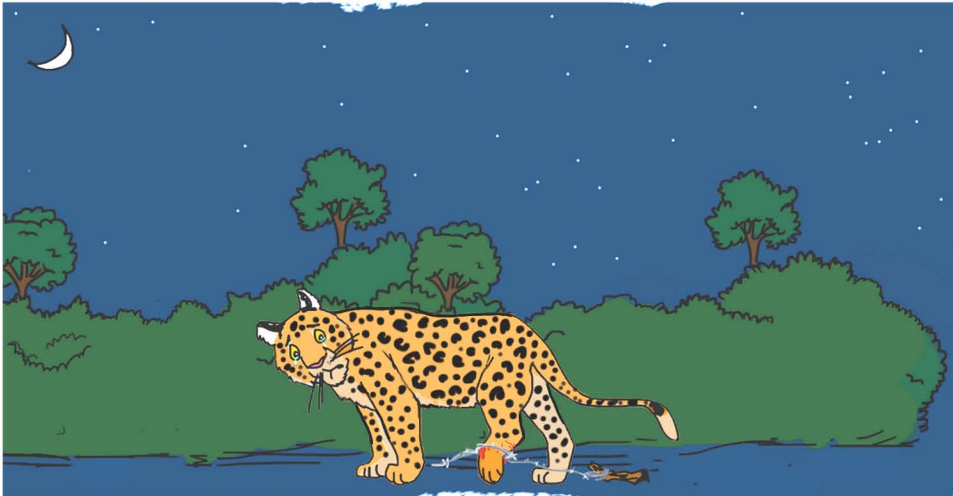
REALITY

Leopards may return to the original site of capture, as shown by radio collaring of leopards in Maharashtra. Other, new leopards, which are unfamiliar with local conditions, occupy the vacated space almost immediately. New leopards, unfamiliar with the new area and local terrain, might do things that may even result in increased conflict. Leopard's behaviour may change with translocation.

Translocated leopards released in the wild may be more aggressive towards humans!

MYTH

KILLING OF LEOPARDS WILL REDUCE CONFLICT

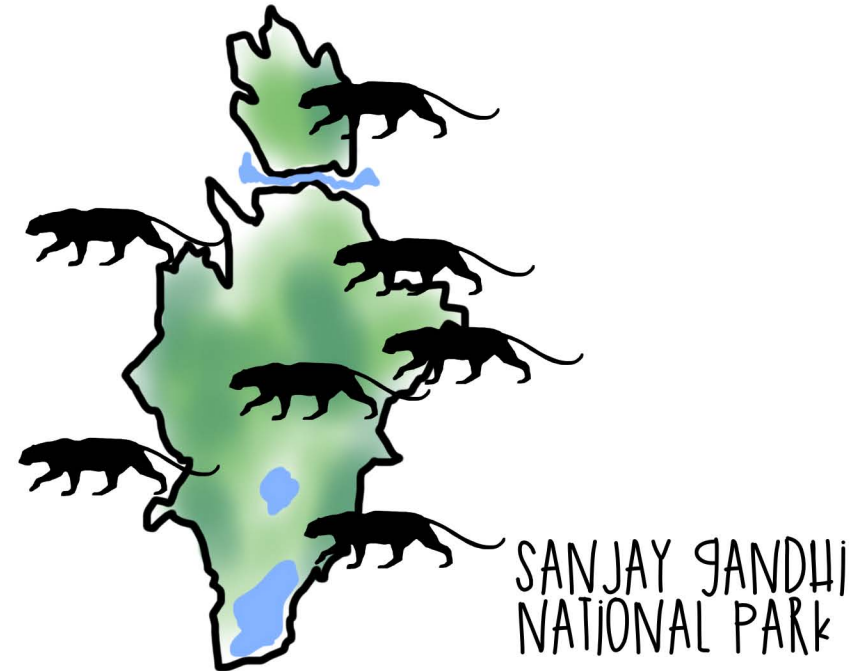


REALITY

Killing of leopards is not a solution. It is very difficult to ascertain which leopard was involved in the attack on humans. Hence, there is no way of being sure which leopard is killed. Leopards injured during the hunting can result in increased risk of human attacks. Killing of leopards (including retaliatory killing or poaching) may result in aggressive behaviour of leopards and behaviour modification towards humans, as studies of radio-collared tigers in Russia have shown. However, if a leopard has repeatedly attacked humans, it is important to remove it from the landscape for safety of humans. But it is also important that we prevent making animals dangerous due to our actions.

MYTH

HIGH LEOPARD DENSITY MEANS HIGH CONFLICT



REALITY

Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Borivalli, Mumbai, with an area of 108 sq. km, is home to 35 leopards (2015 census). Yet, there are few attacks on humans. Earlier, when the Forest Department used to capture leopards on account of public pressure, there used to be a lot of attacks on people.

Now, since the Forest Department has reduced leopard capture and relocation, the attacks on people have stopped.

MYTH

THIS IS THE FOREST DEPARTMENT'S LEOPARD!



REALITY

Whose leopard is it? Leopards and other wildlife, although legally under the Forest Department, really do not understand which humans affect them. The leopard is part of the natural world just as any other animal. It is important for our own safety that we take ownership of the problem and learn to deal with it in a manner that brings peace to both parties, especially us humans. No other person from outside the villages can be more effective in changing the way conflict is played out.

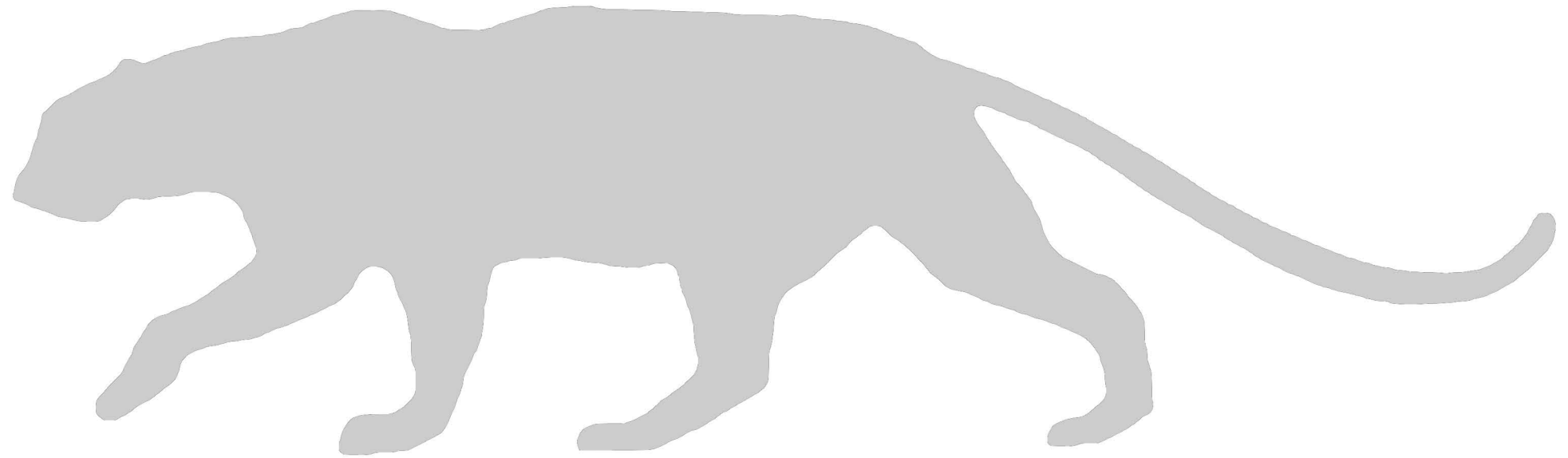
MYTH

LEOPARDS AND PEOPLE CANNOT LIVE TOGETHER



REALITY

People and leopards co-exists in many parts of India. The most common situation in India is one of leopards and people sharing the same space with very low levels of conflict. The Warli tribe lives inside Sanjay Gandhi National park in Mumbai. They have been living with leopards for years with no conflict. The people of Bera, Rajasthan also share their space with leopards without a problem. Both, humans and leopards have healthy respect for each other, know how to take precautions and go on to lead their separate lives without conflict.



LIVING WITH LEOPARDS

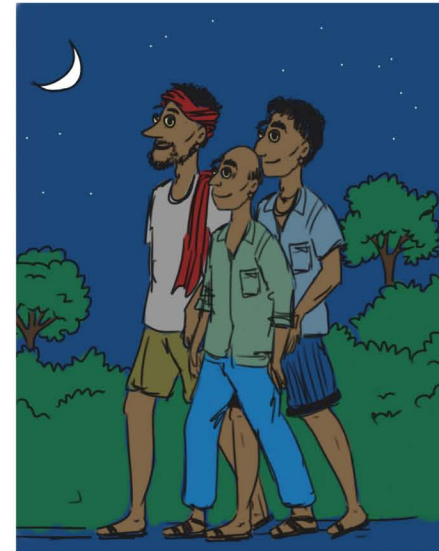
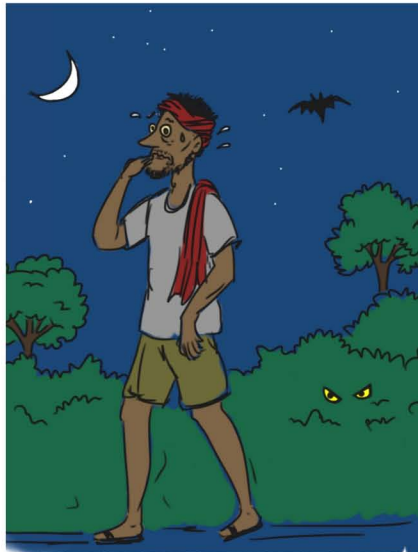
WHAT CAN WE DO?

We can take some simple precautions in order to make the lives of our family and friends safer.

- School going children should travel in groups.
- If you see a leopard, don't be aggressive and throw stones or sticks at the leopard.
- Don't walk alone in the night. Walk in groups.
- Use your own toilets or community toilets; don't go outside to the toilet alone early morning or late at night.

Keep your courtyard and well-used paths well lit at night.

Clear shrubs like *Lantern Ghaas* or *Kaala Baasa* near your home and other well-used paths, which provide cover to the leopard.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Don't allow feral cattle to roam freely in the village. This only attracts leopards to the village.

Allow livestock killed by leopards to remain untouched and undisturbed. If you remove the killed livestock, the leopard will have to hunt again.

Ensure people from outside your village are not hunting leopards in your area, as wounded leopards could be dangerous to your village people.

Prevent hunting of wild prey around your village so that wild food is available for the leopards.

Protect your domestic animals well in the night.



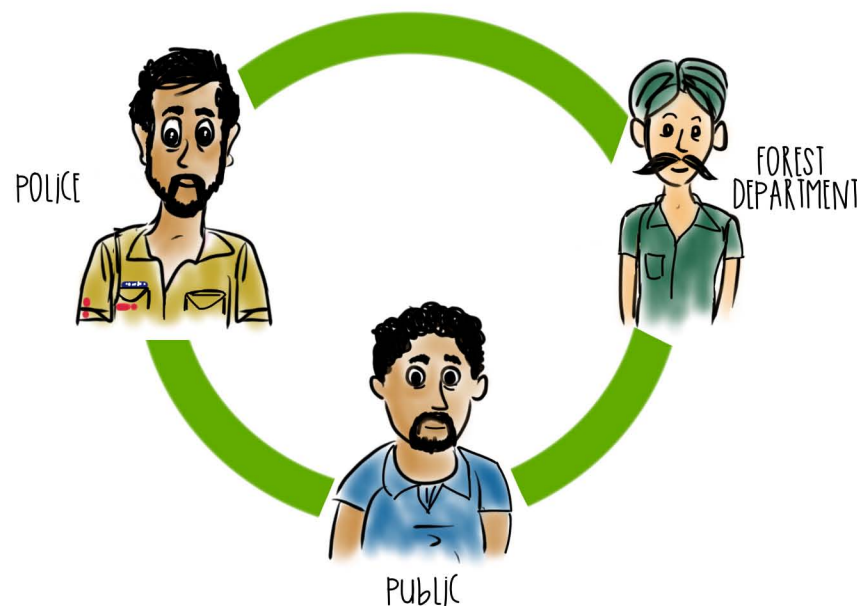
WHAT CAN THE FOREST DEPARTMENT DO?

Well-equipped, trained team which responds quickly to incidents of human attacks.

Show empathy towards the victims/victim's relative. Ensure that local people's concerns and fears are heard out in a humane manner and necessary handholding is done.

Provide speedy medical treatment to injured people.

Ensure speedy compensation with minimum of procedural delays.



WHAT CAN THE FOREST DEPARTMENT DO?

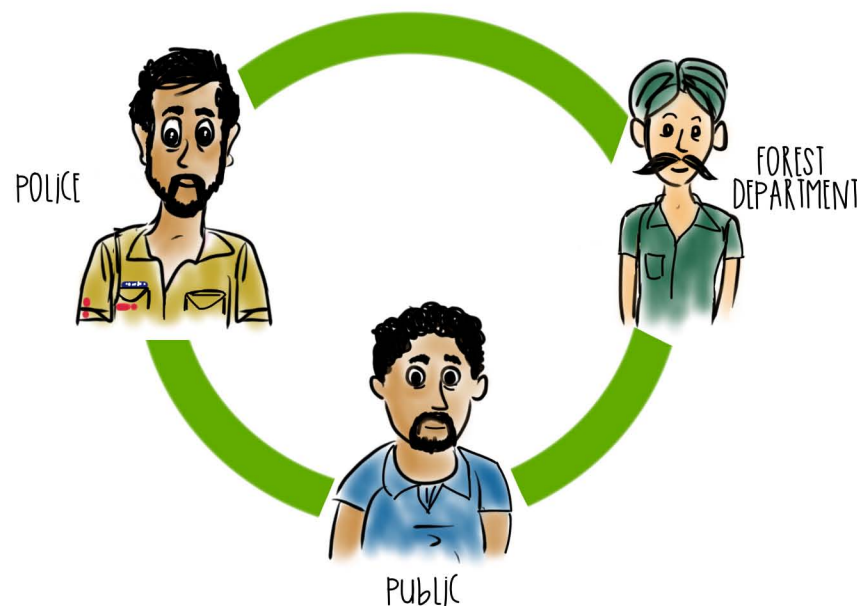
After an attack, conduct local patrolling involving forest staff and local village teams at least for a week.

Support local suggestions such as providing lighting at well-used tracks, support for shrub removal, etc.

Help spread awareness about reducing leopard conflict.

Media management to ensure that sensible news coverage is provided.

Involve police and civic administration in issues like mob control and media management.



WHAT CAN THE MEDIA DO?

Report responsibly. Fact-based reporting.

Don't sensationalize news. Speak to experts before reporting.

Take a balanced view of the leopard conflict.

Media can be the change agent in ensuring that different groups of people (politicians, forest department, civic administration, etc) work positively to solve the conflict in the long term.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Busting Myths about Leopards, 2017 © WCS-India & Titli Trust

Text Biology Posters © Mrunal M. Ghosalkar & Vidya Athreya

Text Busting Myths © Sanjay Sondhi & Vidya Athreya

Biology Posters sketches © Media World, Varsha Bamugade

Busting Myths, covers sketches © Arjun Srivathsa

Conceptualized by Sanjay Sondhi & Vidya Athreya | Designed by Arjun Srivathsa

Supported by:

Wildlife Conservation Society, India | Titli Trust | Uttarakhand Forest Department

Funding support: ONGC Ltd

Citation: Sondhi, S. & V. R. Athreya (2017). Busting Myths about Leopards. Published by WCS & Titli Trust.



TITLI TRUST



Conserving nature
Protecting the environment



INDIA