Exploring Drivers of Human-Elephant Conflict in Tanzania

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Due to changes in land use and elephant distribution in East Africa, human-elephant conflict is quickly becoming one of the leading threats to African elephant populations. Due to the size of the species’ range, national parks do not provide adequate protection. Distributions of nearly all elephant populations change seasonally due to resource availability. Consequently, humans and elephants often share land and resources, leading to conflict.

Elephants often raid crops, destroy wells, and may even injure local residents. Because of this, conflict with elephants can cause significant harm to livelihoods and the wellbeing of local communities, as well as place elephant populations under greater risk of poaching. The inadequate support from Tanzania’s government for communities experiencing human-elephant conflict has led to increased frustrations with the government and conservation, and in some cases has resulted in the poaching of elephants by locals or failing to report poaching.

This project examines through multiple lenses the forces that have shaped human-elephant conflict, incorporating a 2016 case study of elephant distribution and human-elephant conflict in Esilalei, Tanzania, a historical overview of wildlife conservation in the country, elephant dispersal and population dynamics, currently implemented mitigation strategies, and an evaluation of conflict quantification methods.

Esilalei provides an example of human-elephant interactions reflective of many rural areas in northern Tanzania. Most Esilalei residents are agro pastoralists, raising livestock and cultivating crops for subsistence purposes with some additional income from tourism and the local market. Esilalei is bordered by Lake Manyara to the northwest and Manyara Ranch to the southeast, and is located within the migratory corridor that stretches from Tarangire National Park to Manyara National Park and Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The consequences of its geographic location are reflected in elephant distribution maps and local experiences of human-elephant conflict. Throughout my research, I use the case of Esilalei as an example of how human-elephant conflict impacts both the people who live there and wildlife conservation in Tanzania more broadly.

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