

# To coexist with humans, tigers take to the night

September 17, 2012 | Author: AAAS member -- Freelance Writer Mary Bates, Ph.D.



If the world's tigers, like this Bengal tiger, are to survive then learning to coexist with humans will be critical to avoiding dangerous confrontations for both species (Image: Paul Mannix)

An international team of researchers noticed what seemed to be a paradoxical pattern in Nepal's Chitwan National Park. The reserve supports a healthy population of tigers, as well as abundant and ubiquitous human activity. Yet, interactions between humans and tigers are relatively rare. [The study, published September 4 in the \*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences\*,](#) revealed the park's tigers were more active at night, when humans were not around.

Chitwan is home to about 121 tigers. People live on the park's borders, but venture into tiger territory to forage, hunt, and collect firewood. The park is also frequented by a growing number of tourists, and military units that pass through the park's narrow roads to prevent poaching. People and tigers compete for some of the same resources, primarily space. But the two species are wary of each other and tend to avoid interacting if possible.

The researchers set up motion-detecting cameras in and around the park. The images they collected over two years showed that people and tigers completely overlapped in space, walking the same roads and trails. People used the paths during the day, but tigers, which are normally active during the day, switched to the night. The same cameras that captured images of people traversing the park in daylight also captured tigers at the exact same locations under the cover of darkness.

This study shows people and tigers can coexist and use the same spaces. Learning to share space with people is critical for the world's remaining tiger population. The results challenge the conventional wisdom that tigers, or other large predators, cannot coexist with people. In the past, this way of thinking has led to people being relocated to create human-free space for wildlife. If tigers are to have a viable long-term future, human needs must be balanced with the needs of tigers and other wild animals.

## Related Links:

- PNAS: ["Coexistence between wildlife and humans at fine spatial scales"](#)
- [Jack Liu tracks our ecological footprint](#)