

## The role of disease in human-wildlife interactions

Day 2 | 11 July 2026, 4:30-6:00 PM

This is a summary of the discussions that took place at the [special interest group](#) meeting on the role of disease in human-wildlife interactions. Participants included wildlife biologists, ecologists, immunologists, wildlife veterinarians and students. After an introductory presentation of the problem statement and the goal of this SIG, we opened it up for discussion.

Initial conversations focussed on how we could use videos that are circulated on WhatsApp and social media, of wild animals that are behaving abnormally, often taken when they have come into close contact with humans, such as the Pilibhit tigress, and the recent videos of the lioness in Palitana. Ongoing work trying to use AI tools to map and score gait, from videos of captive lions, to assess inbreeding was discussed, and it was suggested that similar tools could be used to analyse these publicly available videos. We discussed the possibility of creating a database of such videos.

We also learnt about ongoing work on zoonoses in bats, where two distinct seasonal spikes of corona virus shedding were found, highlighting that data on the baseline immunological states is critical to understand how these interactions play out. The [World Organisation for Animal Health](#) was mentioned as a potential learning and reference point.

There was also considerable discussion on the challenges of sample collection. Surveillance often requires testing blood and saliva, which are not easily obtainable from wild animals, especially in protected areas, where permits are rarely given for such research. However, it would be useful to begin with the analysis of samples from wild-caught or deceased animals, and to propose an SOP for the same. Ensuring the SOPs are followed would require working closely with Forest Department officials and conservation NGOs, and offering training and support.

Everyone agreed that it was important to have both active and passive surveillance to assess the prevalence of disease, and to be able to then correlate it with abnormal behaviour. The importance of conducting parallel awareness workshops with communities living in these zones of overlap, along with such surveillance was also discussed.

We were informed that a [National Wildlife Health Policy](#) is being drafted, and that we should push for this important issue to be included in it. Details of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Surveillance, Disease Reporting and Action for Protected Areas, that is being worked on by a participant, were also shared. It was emphasised that regular and reliable surveillance is an essential starting point for building a country-wide baseline on the prevalence of diseases in wild animals across various taxa.

We agreed to stay in touch and follow up with reviewing the draft SOP, and putting together an opinion piece on the topic, with those who are interested, and to connect with others working on these issues.