

Micro-Sanctuaries Key To Survival Of Wildlife In Human Dominated Landscapes

A new study by a team of researchers from the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Manipal University, Centre for Wildlife Studies and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-India, says that maintaining even the tiniest wildlife sanctuaries will help preserve some biodiversity in increasingly urbanized landscapes.

The authors of the study say their findings could have important implications in future land-use – particularly in rapidly urbanizing regions where some wildlife still persist.

The researchers looked at populations of blackbuck – a near threatened species of antelope – in and around the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary in Nannaj, Maharashtra in south-central India. Increasing encroachment by humans has fragmented grasslands into plantations, grazing areas and agricultural lands. The landscape is densely populated by humans and cattle and is representative of most semi-arid landscapes in India.

The researchers found that blackbuck preferred to stay in the safety of the sanctuary when food was abundant to avoid the risks associated with humans and livestock. But as food declined after the monsoon season, blackbuck began to move into riskier unprotected grasslands, thus responding dynamically to seasonally changing levels of food and risks in the different parts of the landscape

This study finds that the presence of small sanctuaries or “refuges” in densely populated semi-arid landscapes allows these antelopes to survive, and provides clues as to why animals might be moving outside sanctuaries. A desperate search for food could thus be leading blackbuck to make seasonal changes in their movements and venture into more risky areas located outside the sanctuary.