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CARNIVORES, LIVESTOCK, PEOPLE SHARE SAME SPACE IN **RELATIVE PEACE**

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In the southern Rift Valley of Kenya, the Maasai people, their livestock and a range of carnivores – from hyenas to lions and bat-eared foxes – are coexisting fairly happily, according to a visiting scholar at Michigan State University.

“I wouldn’t call the results surprising,” said Meredith Evans Wagner, a visiting scholar from the University of Florida in MSU’s Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability and part of the research team. “Other research has shown that people and carnivores can coexist, but there is a large body of thought that believes carnivores need their own protected space to survive.”

The paper, published in *Biological Conservation*, echoed results of a recent study by Jianguo “Jack” Liu, director of MSU’s CSIS, and Neil Carter, MSU doctoral student, that found that tigers and people share the same space in Chitwan National Park in Nepal, albeit at different times.

Wagner and her colleagues spent more than two years documenting the region’s carnivores, using motion-detecting camera traps to capture images of the creatures and people using four different areas of land: a conservation area with no human settlements; a grazing area that also had no human settlements; a permanent settlement area; and a buffer zone between the grazing and conservation areas that included seasonal human settlements.

Most of the results were expected. The majority of carnivore photos were taken after dark, and most of the larger predators, such as lions and spotted hyenas, tended to be found in the conservation area that didn’t include any human settlements. However, there also were some intriguing findings.

“We found that while there were more striped hyenas in the conservation area, there also were striped hyenas in the buffer zone, close to the human settlement area,” said Wagner, who published the paper with Paul Schuette and Scott Creel, of Montana State University, and Aaron Wagner, postdoctoral researcher at MSU’s BEACON Center for the Study of Evolution in Action. “The hyenas weren’t avoiding that area; they were using the settlement area as a resource in addition to hunting.”

When the Maasai slaughter an animal for food, they throw the scraps out their back doors. This is at the edge of the buffer zone, where the striped hyenas were happy to eat them.

“Carnivores aren’t a problem for this group of Maasai,” Wagner said. “They’ve made a conscious decision to not hunt carnivores. If one of their livestock is killed by a carnivore, people don’t go out and kill a carnivore in retaliation. It’s a little bit unusual in that way. But in our study, we found that carnivores killing livestock didn’t happen a lot.”

Wildlife is clearly driven away from the permanent settlement areas, said Aaron Wagner.

“But the seasonal human migration out of the buffer zone keeps that area viable for wildlife,” he said. “Numbers drop when the cattle and people move in, but the striped hyenas seem to have habits that allow them to compensate. They do scavenge around Maasai settlements when the pickings are good, but they hunt, too.”

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