



Revered around the world, but persecuted throughout its range

Portrait of a Bengal tiger. © WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey

The largest cat of all, the tiger is a powerful symbol among the different cultures that share its home. But this magnificent animal is being persecuted across its range. Tigers are poisoned, shot, trapped, and snared, largely as a result of conflicts with people and to meet the demands of a continuing illegal trade in tiger derivatives and parts. On top of this, both their habitat and natural prey continue to disappear. Over the past 100 years, tiger numbers have declined by 95 per cent and three sub-species have become extinct – with a fourth not seen in the wild for over 25 years.

There are six living sub-species of tiger

1. The Amur tiger (*P. t. altaica*; also known as the Siberian tiger) is the largest of the tiger sub-species. Once found in the taiga and boreal forests of the Russian Far East, China, and the Korean peninsula, it is now restricted to two provinces in the Russian Far East, and possibly to small pockets in the border areas of China and North Korea.

Although brought back from the brink of extinction (see *Focus Project box*) and now numbering 431–529 individuals, the sub-species remains classified as Critically Endangered.

2. The Bengal tiger (*P. t. tigris*) is the most numerous sub-species, numbering 3,000–4,500 individuals. India is home to the largest total population of the sub-species, which is also found in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, and Nepal. The Bengal tiger inhabits deciduous, temperate, and evergreen forests, grasslands, and mangroves, and is classified as Endangered.

3. The Indochinese tiger (*P. t. corbetti*) probably numbers 700–1,225 individuals, dispersed widely throughout six countries: mainly Thailand, but also Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Classified as Critically Endangered, it mostly lives in tropical deciduous, semi-evergreen, and evergreen forests. ▶

At a glance:

Species:	Tiger (<i>Panthera tigris</i>)
Habitat:	Wide range, including evergreen forests, rainforests, temperate forests, deciduous forests, grasslands, and mangrove swamps
Location:	South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Russian Far East
Population:	5,000–7,000
Status:	Endangered to Critically Endangered (IUCN-The World Conservation Union)



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4. The **Malayan tiger** (*P. t. jacksoni*) was only identified as being a separate sub-species from the Indochinese tiger in 2004. It is found only in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, that is, in the southern tip of Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia. The population is unknown, but has been estimated as at least 500 individuals. The status of the sub-species has not yet been determined.

5. The **South China tiger** (*P. t. amoyensis*; also known as the Xiamen or Amoy tiger) has not been sighted in the wild for more than 25 years, and is believed by many scientists to be “functionally extinct”. A few individuals may remain in the moist forests of southeast China, but hope for their survival is slim as there is neither adequate habitat nor prey left.

6. The **Sumatran tiger** (*P. t. sumatrae*), the smallest surviving sub-species, is Critically Endangered. Found only on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, it is threatened by poaching and large-scale habitat loss. Fewer than 400 individuals are confined mostly to protected areas in montane forests, peat swamps, and remaining blocks of lowland rainforest, which are threatened by conversion to agriculture and plantations, logging, and road construction.

The three other tiger sub-species, the **Bali** (*P. t. balica*), **Caspian** (*P. t. virgata*), and **Javan** (*P. t. sondaica*) tigers, became extinct in the 20th century.

What are the problems facing tigers?

Hunting, poaching, and illegal trade

Tigers have always been hunted — as status symbols, for decorative items such as wall and floor coverings, as souvenirs and curios, and for use in traditional Asian medicines. Hunting for sport probably caused the greatest decline in tiger populations up until the 1930s. In addition, in many areas tigers were regarded as a pest that needed to be exterminated.

In the early 1990s, it became clear that trade in tiger bone for traditional medicines threatened to drive tigers to extinction in the wild. Thanks to increased national and international investment in tiger conservation, trade control, and promotion of substitutes for tiger bone, the availability of tiger-based medicines has been reduced.

Tigers are now protected throughout their range, and international trade in tiger parts and derivatives is illegal.

However, poaching persistently feeds continuing consumer demand for various tiger body parts, with skins now appearing to be the major form of trade.

Poaching is the largest immediate threat to the species worldwide and is often driven by organized crime groups working internationally. According to the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC, tiger poaching, illegal trade, and export of tiger bones occurs on a regular basis in India, the country with the largest populations of wild tigers, to satisfy black-market demand in other countries. In Indonesia, TRAFFIC has estimated that at least 50 Sumatran tigers were poached per year between 1998 and 2002 to supply Indonesian and international markets for tiger skins and body parts.

In China, owners of large-scale “tiger farms” that breed tigers as tourist attractions are pushing the government to rescind its 1993 ban on domestic trade in tiger parts, to allow the sale of products made from farmed tigers such as tiger bone wine. If such trade is allowed, experts believe it would have a devastating impact on wild tiger populations across Asia.

Conflict with humans

As tigers continue to lose their habitat and prey species, they are increasingly coming into conflict with humans as they attack domestic animals — and sometimes people. The cost for farmers can be high: for example, livestock loss due to tigers is estimated to have cost more than US\$400,000 in the last decade in Terengganu, one of the poorest areas in peninsular Malaysia.

In retaliation, tigers are often killed by authorities or angry villagers, or else captured and put in zoos. Conflict with humans is a significant problem, particularly in Malaysia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and parts of India. Tigers killed as “conflict” animals often end up sold on the black market, creating a link between human-tiger conflict and poaching.

Habitat and prey loss

Less than 100 years ago, tigers prowled the forests of eastern Turkey and the Caspian region of Western Asia, across to the Indian sub-continent, China, and Indochina, south to Indonesia, and north to the Korean Peninsula and the Russian Far East. But growing human populations, particularly since the 1940s, have both contracted and fragmented the tiger’s former range. The animals are now



South China tiger, China. © WWF-Canon / John MacKinnon



Villagers participating in WWF meeting, Central India. © WWF-Canon / Tshewang R. Wangchuk



Bengal tiger. © WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey



Sumatran tiger cubs, Sumatra, Indonesia.
© WWF-Canon / Alain Compost.



Tiger and other skins confiscated at Heathrow Airport, United Kingdom.
© WWF-Canon / Edward Parker

found in just 7 per cent of their historic range. Although extensive habitat is available in some landscapes, agriculture, clearing of forests for the timber trade, and rapid development — especially road networks — are forcing tigers into small, scattered islands of remaining habitat.

Tigers need large territories, so reduced habitat means that fewer tigers can survive in the wild. In addition, isolated populations are more susceptible to inbreeding, and small islands of habitat are more accessible to poachers than large tracts of natural forest.

Along with habitat loss, tigers have suffered from severe loss of natural prey populations — in particular, ungulates such as wild deer, goats, sheep, and pigs — either due to direct hunting by people or through competition from introduced domestic animals. Together with poaching, large-scale habitat destruction and decimation of prey populations are the major long-term threats to the continued existence of tigers in the wild.

What is WWF doing to reduce threats to tigers in the wild?

Tigers are ‘flagship’ species for their habitats — that is, charismatic representatives of the biodiversity within the complex ecosystems they inhabit. Because these animals need a lot of space to survive, their conservation will help maintain biological diversity over extensive areas and so help many other species.

WWF has been working to conserve tigers for over four decades. In 2002, WWF developed a new and far-reaching strategy in partnership with other conservationists and authorities. The cornerstone of this Tiger Conservation Programme is a landscape-based approach to conservation supported by a strong programme to address illegal trade wherever it occurs.

Seven priority landscapes have been identified where conservation will most benefit the long-term survival of tigers in the wild. Within these key landscapes, WWF and its partners work to reduce or remove threats to tigers in the wild by:

- restoring habitat, maintaining connectivity, and securing a wilderness landscape
- strengthening anti-poaching efforts
- mitigating human-tiger conflicts, such as promoting creative land-use planning
- facilitating creative land-use planning to solve problems facing wildlife and people
- monitoring tiger and prey populations to improve tiger management strategies
- stopping the illegal trade in tiger parts.

In 2006, WWF and partners released the most comprehensive assessment of tiger habitat ever done, identifying 76

landscapes (covering more than a total of over 1 million km²) with sufficient habitat for at least five tigers and where tigers have been confirmed to occur in the last ten years. Of these, 20 landscapes were identified as global priorities. Yet just 23 per cent of this habitat is protected from development and logging as reserves, sanctuaries, or national parks.

The study found some good news, however. Over half of the landscapes still support more than 100 tigers and seven strongholds exist that can still support more than 500 tigers each.

Examples of current work to conserve tigers in priority areas include:

1. WWF and TRAFFIC — operated as a joint programme by and between WWF and IUCN–The World Conservation Union — work together to stop the illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives through informer networks, research into the dynamics of the trade, and building the capacity of enforcement agencies to catch those involved, as well as encouraging the use of tiger alternatives by traditional medicine consumers.

2. In the Russian Far East, WWF is one of many partners involved in vigorous anti-poaching and other conservation efforts (see *Focus Project*).

3. In India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, WWF works with many partners to strengthen anti-poaching efforts, eliminate illegal trade, establish well-connected protected areas, restore natural habitat, and reduce human-tiger conflict. The work includes establishing ecological corridors as well as improving the livelihoods of local people and reducing their pressure and dependence on forests.

4. In northern peninsular Malaysia, a WWF-led initiative has significantly reduced human-tiger conflict through better livestock management, such as teaching villagers techniques to adequately corral livestock at night. A campaign by WWF also helped reverse a decision to eliminate all tigers in the state of Kelantan.

5. In Sumatra, Indonesia, WWF has successfully lobbied corporate partners and the Indonesian government to declare the rainforest of Tesso Nilo as a protected area and is using camera traps to identify which forests are most used by tigers. Tesso Nilo — the last-remaining block of lowland tropical rainforest for the Sumatran tiger and home to 3 per cent of the world’s mammal species — is fast disappearing due to large-scale conversion to commercial plantations and illegal logging.

6. In Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam, WWF has identified core areas and corridors for protecting and monitoring tigers and other key species in the Lower Mekong Forests. WWF is working with government partners to promote sustainable forest resource management and strengthen the management of key protected areas, especially improving law enforcement to reduce poaching and trade.

Focus Project: Priority Tiger Landscape; Russian Far East

A dense jungle in summer, blanketed by snow in winter — the vast tracts of forest in Russia's southeastern corner are unique. Home to a large number of endemic species, they are the only place in the world where Manchurian species such as Amur tigers, Amur leopards, musk deer, and Himalayan black bears roam with Siberian brown bears, wolverines, and Siberian jays. The region is critical for the conservation of Amur tigers, and is a global priority landscape.

By the 1940s, hunting had driven the Amur tiger to the brink of extinction, with no more than 40 individuals remaining in the wild. The sub-species was saved when Russia became the first country to grant the tiger full protection — and also by the Cold War, which saw its forest home completely closed off to most people.

By the 1980s, the population had increased to around 500. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s saw a poaching epidemic, mainly driven by Russia's economic crisis combined with a relaxation of border controls and a ready access to the wildlife and traditional medicine markets of East Asia.

WWF is one of many partner organizations supporting the Russian government to counter this through vigorous anti-poaching efforts. One member of WWF's anti-poaching brigades, Pavel Fomenko, was recognized as a Hero of the Planet by Time Magazine in 2000 for his efforts, which led to the capture of 700 weapons and 2,000 poachers. WWF and TRAFFIC have also helped train over 1,000 Russian customs agents to monitor trade in wildlife products like tiger skins. In addition, over 60,000 students and 200 teachers have been trained in tiger issues through special education programmes.

WWF was one of the organizations to support the 2005 Winter Survey of Amur Tigers, which found that the population is stable, with between 334–417 adults and 97–112 cubs. This population is the largest unfragmented tiger population in the world.

However, poaching of Amur tigers and their prey remains a problem. In addition, their forests are under threat from logging, conversion to agriculture, urban expansion, road construction, mining, fires, and inadequate law enforcement.

To help protect the tigers' habitat, WWF and its Russian partners successfully laid the groundwork for the designation of Annuisky National Park, Mataisky Special Reserve, and Kluchevskoy Nature Park. In partnership with the Russian authorities and other NGOs, WWF is

currently helping establish Econet, an ecological network of well-managed protected areas that will become a connected habitat for the tiger. Emphasis is on recovery of prey species, regulated hunting management, and anti-poaching.

The work also integrates with forest and freshwater conservation efforts in the Russian Far East. For example, WWF, the Russian Federal Forest Service, and other partners developed a national forest fire prevention strategy and helped improve the availability of equipment and training for firefighters and forest managers. In addition, WWF supports timber anti-poaching brigades to protect the forests from illegal logging, which is rampant in the region.

This tiger landscape is part of the Russian Far East Broadleaf and Conifer Forests Ecoregion — one of WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions, biologically outstanding habitats where WWF concentrates its efforts.



*Anti-poaching brigade in Lazovskiy Nature Reserve, Russian Federation.
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*Amur tiger lying in the snow.
© WWF / Kevin Schafer*

Find out more...

This fact sheet is designed to give a broad overview of some of the threats faced by tigers, and to give examples of WWF and TRAFFIC's work and solutions on the ground. For more detailed information on species, WWF, TRAFFIC, and the work we do, please visit www.panda.org/species and www.traffic.org

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