



Revered around the world, but persecuted throughout its range

Amur or Siberian tiger. © Chris Martin Bahr / WWF-Canon

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 to meet the demands of a continuing illegal trade in tiger parts and as a result of conflict with people. On top of this, both their habitat and natural prey continue to disappear. Over the past 100 years, tiger numbers have declined from 100,000 to as low as 3,200. A 2006 habitat study found that the remaining tigers survive in 40 percent less area than they occupy just a decade ago. Today, they are limited to just seven per cent of their historic range.

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. Although brought back from the brink of extinction (see *Focus Project box*) and now numbering about 450 individuals, the sub-species has recently declined and it remains classified as endangered.

2. The endangered **Bengal tiger** (*P. t. tigris*) is the most numerous sub-species, numbering around 1,850 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 forests, temperate forests, grasslands, and mangroves.

3. Dispersed widely throughout seven countries (Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam), the critically endangered **Indochinese tiger** (*P. t. corbetti*) probably numbers as few as 350 individuals. 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:	Currently estimated to be as low as 3,200
Status:	Endangered to Critically Endangered (IUCN The World Conservation Union)

Indochinese tiger. © Kabir Backie / WWF Greater Mekong



4. The **Malayan tiger** (*P. t. jacksoni*) was only identified as being a separate sub-species from the Indochinese tiger in 2004 and is classified as endangered. 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 at about 500 individuals.

5. Thought to be the ancestor of all tigers, the critically endangered **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. It is believed by scientists to be extinct.

6. The smallest surviving sub-species, the **Sumatran tiger** (*P. t. sumatrae*) is critically endangered. Found only on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, it is threatened by poaching and large-scale habitat loss. There are about 400 Sumatran tigers that 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 commercial 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?

Poaching, and illegal trade

For over 1,000 years, tigers have been hunted for their parts, which are used as status symbols, decorative items such as wall and floor coverings, 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 evident 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. Tiger trade was banned in China, the main consuming country, and tiger bone officially removed from the Chinese Pharmacopoeia in 1993. However, poaching persistently feeds continuing consumer demand for various tiger body parts.

This poaching is the largest immediate threat to the species worldwide. According to a report by the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC, tiger poaching, illegal trade, and export of tiger bones occur on a regular basis in India, the country with the largest populations of wild tigers, with at least 60 tigers poached in India in 2009. Another TRAFFIC report published in 2007 found tiger body parts openly for sale in retail outlets in 28 cities and towns across Sumatra, Indonesia.

Habitat and prey loss

Less than a hundred 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. 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 live in some of the most diverse places on Earth from the Russian Far East where the temperature can be as low as minus 50 degrees to the steamy jungles of South East Asia where it can be as hot as plus 50 degrees. Tigers need large territories to survive, 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 such as wild deer, goats, sheep, and pigs. Large-scale habitat destruction and reduction of prey populations are the major long-term threats to the continued existence of tigers in the wild.

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 over 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 kept in zoos.



Sumatran tiger. © David Lawson / WWF-UK



Bengal tiger. © Staffan Widstrand / WWF



Siberian Tiger. © David Lawson / WWF-UK



WWF Tiger anti-poaching brigade, Amur region, Russian Federation.
© Hartmut Jungius / WWF-Canon

Confiscated tiger and leopard skins, Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal.
© Kevin Schafer / WWF-Canon



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

WWF has been working to conserve tigers for over four decades. Tigers are flagship species for their habitats—that is, charismatic representatives of the biodiversity within the complex and widely diverse ecosystems they inhabit. Because these animals need a lot of space to survive, their conservation will help maintain biological diversity and ecological integrity over extensive areas and so help many other species, including humans. Healthy tiger habitat provides people with food sources and clean water, and ecotourism in protected areas that have tigers provides people with jobs and income, by saving tigers, we save so much more.

WWF is working to protect the tiger through its ambitious network-wide Tiger Initiative, which consolidates and magnifies work across the tiger's range in a way that has never been done before. Actions range from landscape-based planning and on-the-ground protection bolstered by regional scale efforts to stop illegal trade, through to positively engaging the global drivers of tiger habitat destruction and working with politicians at the highest levels to bolster the political will needed to protect tigers in all 13 tiger range states.

Only such a fully integrated approach will save the tiger.

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 alternatives.

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

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.

5. In northern peninsular Malaysia, in the Belum-Temengor forest complex, one of Malaysia's three priority areas of tiger conservation, WWF is working with partners to improve the

management of tiger and tiger prey habitats, strengthen anti-poaching efforts, identify ecological linkages, monitor land-use changes and raise public awareness on wildlife conservation.

6. In Sumatra, Indonesia, WWF has successfully lobbied corporate partners and the Indonesian government to declare the rainforest of Tesso Nilo as a protected area. Tesso Nilo—the last-remaining block of lowland tropical rainforest for the Sumatran tiger and home to three per cent of the world's mammal species—is fast disappearing due to large-scale conversion to commercial plantations and illegal logging.

The Government of Indonesia, together with all 10 provincial governors in Sumatra, committed at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October 2008 to prevent further forest loss which will help secure remaining habitat of the estimated 400 Sumatran tigers still surviving on this mega-diverse island.

7. In Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam, across the Greater Mekong region, WWF has identified key landscapes for protecting and monitoring tigers and tiger prey species. In Thailand, WWF is concentrating its work within the Kayah Karen Tenasserim forests that border with Myanmar. Meanwhile in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, work is focused within the Lower Mekong Dry 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.

8. In Bhutan, WWF is strengthening anti-poaching efforts along with training police, customs and border security forces on recognizing and countering illegal wildlife trade. WWF is also supporting the Royal government in realigning the corridors system that joins all the protected areas in Bhutan, which is prime tiger habitat and has helped formulate the National Tiger Action Plan of Bhutan.

9. Globally, WWF is a key player in an effort to convene a Heads of State Summit for tiger conservation. WWF, the Russian government and the World Bank have agreed to help establish the Summit where the 13 tiger range state countries will be expected to make the strongest political commitments to saving wild tigers ever seen. The summit is to be hosted by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and co-chaired by the World Bank's President Robert Zoellick in Vladivostok, Russia in September 2010. WWF is also a part of the Global Tiger Initiative (GTI), which a coalition of NGOs and institutions supported by a dedicated secretariat in the World Bank that is leading a process to engage the highest levels of government in this summit.

Focus Project: Priority Tiger Landscape; Russian Far East

A dense forest in summer, blanketed by snow in winter —the vast tracts of forest in Russia's south-eastern 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 bears roam with Siberian brown bears, wolverines, and Siberian jays. The region is critical for the conservation of Amur tigers, and is one of WWF's Priority Tiger Landscapes.

By the 1940s, hunting had driven the Amur tiger to the brink of extinction, with no more than 40 individuals remaining in the wild. A ban on tiger hunting and capturing as well as creation of large protected areas helped to bring the Amur tiger from the edge of extinction. 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 organizations supporting the Russian government to counter this through vigorous anti-poaching efforts. In the last 15 years, rangers from WWF supported brigades have confiscated tiger skins and weapons and have caught poachers as well as assisted in criminal cases. Thanks to the efforts of WWF and other governmental and grassroots organizations Amur tiger numbers remain at about 450 animals.

The Amur tiger population is the largest unfragmented tiger population in the world. However, poaching of Amur tigers and their prey remains a problem. In addition, their habitats are shrinking due to logging, urban expansion, road construction, mining, forest fires and inadequate law enforcement.

To combat these threats WWF has helped develop a Tiger Eco-Net, which is a network of protected areas that will become a connected habitat for tiger. It has assisted in the creation of a training and education centre at the Vladivostok Branch of the Russia Customs Academy on the Russia-China border, where customs officials learn how to effectively control the movement of natural resources across the border.

WWF has also created a network of model hunting estates that focuses their management on increasing the number of wild ungulates such as boar and deer so there are enough for both hunters and tigers. As a result, the number of ungulates and tigers has doubled in these areas.

In order to raise public awareness on the importance of a healthy Amur tiger population and educate hunters on how to hunt responsibly and on how to behave if they encounter tigers in the wild, WWF co-organizes a "Tiger Day" holiday that is held annually in Vladivostok and in villages all across Primorskii Province.



Amur or Siberian tiger. © Klein & Hubert / WWF



Measuring the foot print of a tiger paw in the snow. © WWF-Russia/D. Kuchma

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/tigers and www.traffic.org

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