

# EXPLOITING THE TIGER

Illegal Trade, Animal Cruelty and  
Tourists at Risk at the Tiger Temple



An investigation at Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasampanno  
Forest Monastery, Kanchanaburi, Thailand

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the worldwide broadcast of a two-part television documentary on the Thai Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi by Animal Planet, this facility has become a popular tourist destination that attracts hundreds of international visitors each day.

The Tiger Temple's success is based around claims that its tigers were rescued from poachers and live and move freely and peacefully amongst the temple's monks, who are actively engaged in conservation and rescue work.

Prompted by concerns raised by tourists and Tiger Temple volunteer workers, Care for the Wild International's (CWI) investigation uncovered disturbing evidence of serious conservation and animal welfare concerns, including:

- illegal tiger trafficking
- systematic physical abuse of the tigers held at the temple, and
- high risk interactions between tigers and tourists.

This report is based on information collected between 2005 and 2008.

## CONSERVATION

### Illegal Trade

Tigers are threatened with extinction in the wild, and international trade in tigers is recognised as one of the principal causes behind that threat. Whilst the Tiger Temple claims it received its first tigers legitimately as animals rescued from poachers, CWI has obtained evidence that, rather than continuing as a rescue centre, the Temple now operates as a breeding facility and is involved in the clandestine exchange of tigers with the owner of a tiger farm in Laos. These actions contravene Thai, Laos and international law (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora - CITES). CWI has also been in contact with a Thai wildlife trader who claims to have sold the original first few tigers to the temple.



Fig. 1. Indo-Chinese tiger © Louise Murray

Exchange or sale of tigers across international borders is prohibited under international and Thai law. But CWI uncovered that at least seven tigers have disappeared from the Temple between 2005 and 2007, and at least five individuals appeared without explanation (one of whom died soon after arrival). CWI uncovered evidence of regular dealings by the Tiger Temple with a tiger farm in Laos, involving both the import and export of tigers. Most commonly, older animals from the Temple were exchanged for young cubs from Laos. Newly arriving tigers are often given identical names to animals who had been transferred from the Temple to Laos to obscure the fact that tigers are being moved in and out, and to create the illusion of continuity in line with the Temple's claim that it provides its tigers with life-long care.

### Breeding

Breeding tigers requires a Government licence under the Thai Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act 1992. The Temple does not have such a licence but has, by its own records, bred at least 10 cubs from its original animals. A number of other cubs were born, but did not survive.

To be part of a conservation breeding programme, the genetic make-up and history of an animal's parents must be known. But the original animals at the Temple are of unknown origin, nor have they been DNA-tested to identify their sub-species. With this background, the Temple cannot participate in any recognised conservation breeding programme.

Moreover, there is consensus amongst conservationists that releasing captive-bred tigers is almost never a viable option because of shortage of natural habitat and, in the case of animals that are used to human proximity, such as the tigers at the Temple, release is potentially fatal to tigers, humans and livestock.

## ANIMAL WELFARE

### Housing

International zoo guidelines recommend enclosures for tigers of at least 500m<sup>2</sup> per pair or for a female and her cubs. This should include a large outdoor space as well as indoor dens. The space should be enriched with a variety of substrates, climbing structures, and water to swim in. The Tiger Temple keeps approximately 15 tigers at any one

time. Far from being allowed to roam freely as claimed in the Temple's brochures, most animals spend almost all their lives in small, barren concrete and iron cages, measuring just 9m x 3.5m (31.5m<sup>2</sup>) or 12m x 3.1m (37.2m<sup>2</sup>). Late in 2007, a new enclosure was opened which has a limited area of outdoor space (about 80 - 100m<sup>2</sup>) as well as two indoor cages similar to the older ones. This new enclosure houses 2 or 3 tigers. Apart from their totally inadequate size, the cages contain virtually no enrichment. Long-term housing facilities at the temple therefore fall woefully short even of minimum requirements.

## Diet

The recommended diet for captive tigers should consist of entire carcasses, including meat, bone, offal and skin. This should be supplemented with minerals and other essential nutrients. Meat should normally be provided raw, to avoid breaking down vital vitamins and other nutrients. A minimum of 3 to 4 kg of meat per day is the recommended requirement to maintain healthy body condition.

At the Tiger Temple, the tigers' diet consists largely of chicken carcasses (from which the best meat has been removed for human consumption), with some pork or beef off-cuts, largely of fat, and occasional packets of commercial dog or cat food. The usual ration is no more than 3 kg. All food is cooked (which is necessary because of the risk of avian influenza from chicken). However, with all food having been cooked and only pork or beef off-cuts to supplement the basic chicken diet, the tigers are at risk from malnutrition. Essential minerals, such as calcium and other nutrients, e.g. taurine, are also likely to be missing. Malnutrition can result in blindness, muscle wastage, and skeletal deformity. Some of the Temple's tigers indeed suffer from poor eyesight and leg deformities. Cubs are removed from their mothers at between two weeks and two months of age (natural weaning occurs at 4 - 6 months) to be hand-reared on human milk formula, which does not contain appropriate nutrients to insure for proper growth in tigers.

## Tourist Display

Each day between 1pm and 4pm, an average of ten tigers are put on public display in the Temple's 'Tiger Canyon' which, at the end of 2007, received 300 - 400 primarily foreign visitors a day. In early 2008 however, a volunteer estimated more than 880 visitors in a single day. Aside from touching and sitting on the tigers, being photographed with a tigers' heads in your lap provides a chief attraction for visiting tourists. Tigers remain in the Canyon for about three hours. There is virtually no shade (except for what is provided to tourists) and temperatures can rise well above 40°C in the sun.

The tigers are led on a short leash from their cages to the Canyon by Temple staff. There, they are chained on fixed 3m - 5m chains, and heavy concrete bowls are against or set close to the tiger's body to oblige the animal to adopt a good pose for the tourists and maintain it. Tigers are dragged into position by their tail and even punched or beaten to adopt particular postures that appeal to the tourists.

Temple staff stay close to the animals at all times to maintain control by use of tiger urine squirted from a bottle into the animal's face. In the wild, tigers use urine as a territorial or aggressive signal: sprayed at close quarters it would represent an extremely aggressive gesture from a dominant animal.

## Behaviour

Stereotypic behaviour (aimless movements such as head-weaving, chewing, or pacing, repeated many times without change) is common in animals whose natural behaviour is thwarted by inadequate, uninteresting accommodation, or by training or control. At the Temple, pacing and chewing paws is regularly and frequently seen both in the cages and during display. This is indicative of stress and frustration imposed by poor housing and improper handling.

## Visitor Safety

The CWI investigation raises concerns about the safety of visitors to the Tiger Temple. There are numerous well-documented and sometimes fatal attacks on humans by 'trained' and apparently mild-mannered captive wild cats. These include attacks during photography sessions. At the Temple, hundreds of visitors, some of them young children, are actively encouraged to make close physical contact with tigers during daily photo sessions. Staff fail to prevent direct contact with the animals even when tigers are behaving aggressively. Furthermore, staff and the Temple as a whole, are unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with potential emergencies. The Tiger Temple explicitly renounces any responsibility for injuries or damage, by asking visitors to sign a disclaimer at the entrance.

## CONCLUSIONS

The tigers are poorly housed and badly maltreated to make them compliant and perform for visitors. Although the Tiger Temple *may* have begun as a rescue centre for tigers, it has become a breeding centre to produce and keep tigers solely for the tourists and therefore the Temple's benefit. Illegal international trafficking helps to maintain the Temples' captive tiger population. There is no possibility of the Temples' breeding programme contributing to the conservation of the species in the wild.

## INTRODUCTION

According to its own website<sup>1</sup>, the Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasampanno Forest Monastery in Kanchanaburi, Thailand - widely known as the Tiger Temple and founded in 1994 - acquired its first tiger cubs in 1999/2000. Reportedly, the animals were brought to the Monastery by police and other people who had rescued them from tiger poachers. Since then, more tigers have arrived from other sources (as discussed in this report), and have been bred at the Temple. Others have apparently left the Temple at various times.

The Temple is open to visitors, who pay an entrance fee, and actively seeks donations to fund its activities. Tigers are put on display for visitors in a dedicated area adjacent to the Temple. This is known as the 'Tiger Canyon', which has developed into a successful tourist attraction on the basis of the Temple's humane claims. Boosted by the screening of promotional material about the Temple on the television channel 'Animal Planet' (filmed in December 2003<sup>2</sup> and shown around the world on the Discovery Network), tourist numbers grew substantially, with estimates averaging 100 - 300 visitors a day. In early 2008, a volunteer estimated more than 880 visitors on one particular day. Conflicting reports began to emerge from people who had visited the Temple, and from others who had worked there as volunteers. Whilst some reports were supportive of the Temple's work (e.g. [www.tigertemple.co.uk](http://www.tigertemple.co.uk)) many others raised serious concerns about the way the tigers were housed and treated; some also raised questions about some of the animals' origins.

Various people provided information to Care for the Wild International, which prompted further concerns. CWI therefore undertook its own investigations between 2005 - 2008 with the help of individuals who enlisted as volunteers at the Temple. This report summarises the findings of that investigation. CWI's SE Asia representative to the Temple also made formal visits to the Temple in November 2006 and January 2007, to discuss the concerns with the temple management, but they were not open to positive dialogue.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Wild Population - Numbers & Distribution

Less than a century ago, tigers (*Panthera tigris*) occupied much of Central and East Asia. This range has now dramatically diminished, so that the species now exists only in isolated populations from India to Southeast Asia and Sumatra, and a few scattered in China and the Russian Far East (see Fig. 2).

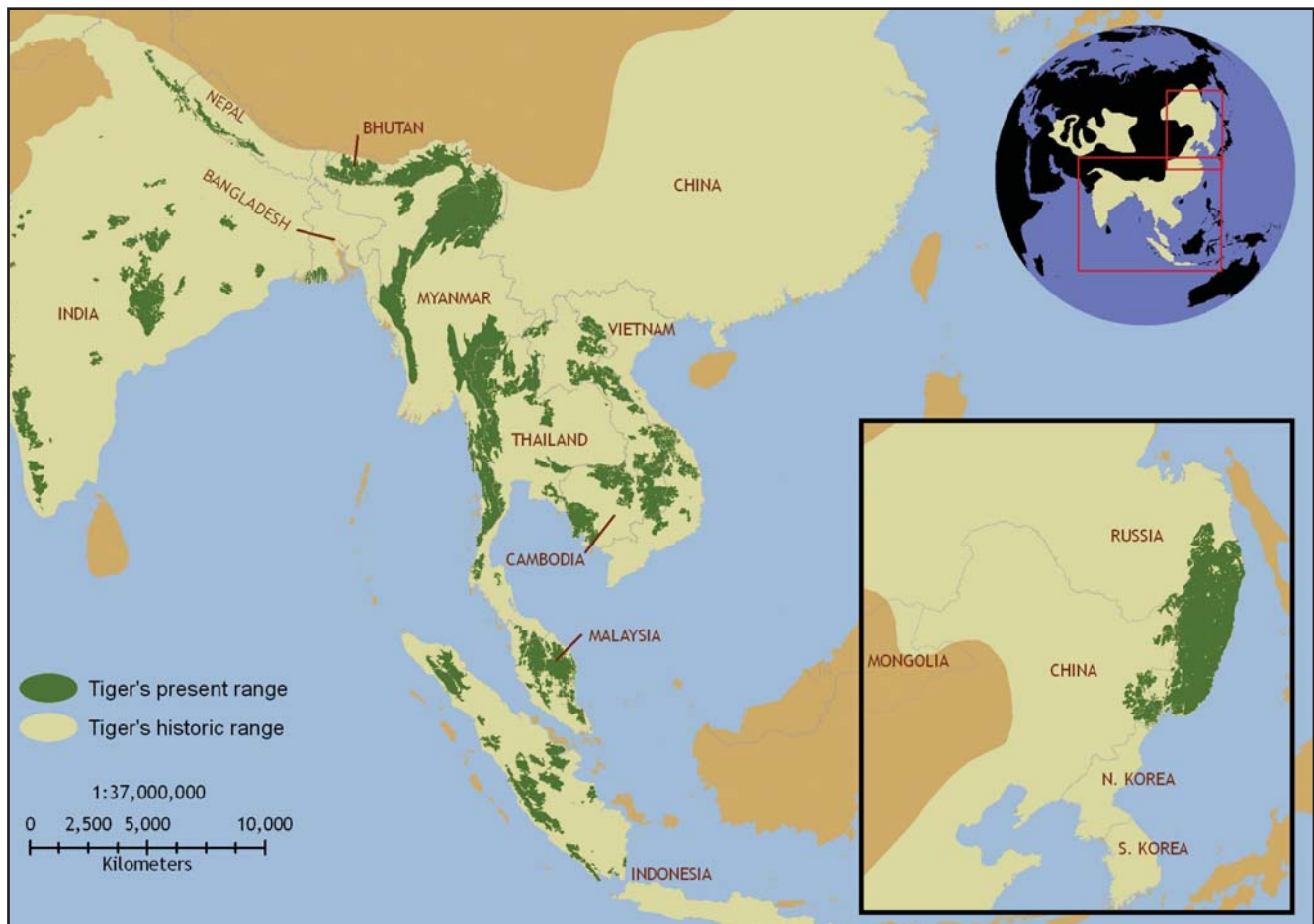


Fig. 2. Tiger range, past and present. Source: Save the Tiger Fund

Different tiger sub-species have a subtly different appearance as well as ecological requirements, and occupy different parts of the species' overall range. Three of originally nine sub-species are already extinct.

Published estimates indicate a world population of between 5,000 and 7,000 wild tigers<sup>3</sup>. Of these, only approx. 700 - 1,220 belong to the Indo-Chinese sub-species, *Panthera tigris corbetti*, which is native to Thailand and other S.E. Asian countries. Only 250 - 500 of these animals are left in Thailand.

These population estimates are based on survey techniques, which some experts believe substantially over-estimate true population numbers.

All six remaining *Panthera tigris* sub-species are listed on The World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Red List as 'Endangered' or 'Critically Endangered'.

## Behaviour in the Wild

The social system of tigers is not very complex. A mother and her young are the basic social unit occupying a territory. Males are solitary, with territories covering the ranges of several females.

Generally, both female and male tigers maintain home ranges that do not overlap with those of other tigers of the same sex. Home range size depends partially on prey availability. Home ranges for both Bengal and Indo-Chinese tigers in S.E. Asia typically cover approximately 20 - 30km<sup>2</sup> for females and 60 - 100km<sup>2</sup> for males.<sup>4,5</sup> Female tigers regularly travel up to 10 - 20km per day, while males can roam considerably further.

Stereotypic behaviour and offspring mortality are recognised indicators of poor welfare. In an extensive analysis of these stereotypes and infant mortality in captive carnivores around the world, Clubb & Mason (2007)<sup>6</sup> found both to be related to home range size and daily travel distance. Put simply, wide-ranging carnivores kept in small enclosures do not fare well. The study suggests that to facilitate good welfare, enrichment for captive carnivores of species with large natural ranges should focus on ranging behaviour, including larger space, multiple dens, and greater daily environmental variety.



Fig. 3. Tigress and her captive born cubs. Source: [www.tigertemple.org](http://www.tigertemple.org)

## Breeding and Conservation

It is debatable whether captive breeding of this rare and endangered species makes any contribution to the overall conservation of tigers. Some argue that it is an essential element of a conservation strategy, while others maintain that, in the long term, breeding in captivity is expensive, inefficient, and mostly fails to successfully re-establish wild populations. Furthermore, without effective protection of suitable wild habitat, captive breeding for conservation is a dead end. If captive breeding is to have any chance of making a positive contribution to species conservation, it must at least fulfil two basic aims: 1. In the long-term, to successfully release animals into the wild to establish stable populations, and 2. in the short term, to maintain a captive population of the species that is genetically and behaviourally appropriate for the eventual re-establishment of the wild population.

Tigers readily breed in captivity. The exact number of animals currently held in captivity is unknown, but it is generally accepted that this number greatly exceeds the number of tigers left in the wild. In the USA alone, there are believed to be more than 10,000 captive tigers<sup>7</sup>. Very few of these animals or their progeny are ever likely to be suitable for release to the wild, because their genetic profile is unknown, also many are in-bred or hybrids between sub-species, and because the animals' behavioural repertoire - curtailed by poor captive environments - is inadequate for survival in the wild.

The World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA) seeks to maximise the contribution captive breeding can make to the conservation of wild tigers by maintaining controlled breeding programmes for each of the six sub-species through "Species Survival Plans". Of the many tens of thousands of captive tigers around the world, WAZA identifies only about 1,000 as suitable for an effective captive breeding programme.<sup>8</sup>

To participate in WAZA's captive breeding programmes, facilities must hold individual tigers of identified genotype and agree to ensure they breed with selected individuals for appropriate genetic diversity within each sub-species. They must also keep tigers in an environment designed to provide the best chance for tigers to maintain their natural behaviour, as detailed by WAZA.

## Breeding and Trade in Thailand

All six remaining *Panthera tigris* subspecies are protected against international commercial trade in live animals, body parts, and manufactured products by CITES.

CITES is implemented through national legislation in all its member states. Thailand became a Party to CITES on ratification of the Convention on 21/01/1983, and the Convention entered into force in Thailand three months later, on 21/04/1983. National legislation to implement the Convention was not created until 1992, in the Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act.

Resolutions urging member countries to implement protection measures for tigers more rigorously were repeatedly passed at several CITES meetings, most recently at the 12th Conference in 2002. In 2007, Thailand responded to this Resolution by reporting to CITES the establishment of a National Wildlife Law Network Committee, a Programme Co-ordination Unit of ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Networks, and a new Wildlife Task Force. In addition, Thailand reported holding a number of enforcement training seminars.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 4. Confiscated tiger and leopard skins © Wildlife Conservation Nepal

Under the Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act 1992, apart from a general prohibition of trade, it is illegal to possess or breed tigers without being registered with the government. The Act states that breeding, possession and trading of wild animals without such registration is an offence punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years or fines not exceeding thirty thousand Baht (approx US \$1,000), or both.

## RESULTS

### Legal Status

CWI learned through meetings with the Department of National Parks (DNP), that the Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasampanno Forest Monastery in Kanchanburi (Tiger Temple) is not registered with the Thai Government, and so has no legal grounds to hold or breed tigers in captivity. According to the DNP, they informed the Temple in 2005 that the Temple is not a licensed or registered facility. However, since there were no government facilities to house any confiscated tigers, the Temple was allowed to continue caring for them on the condition that neither breeding nor trade was to occur.

### Temple Tiger Histories

According to the Temples' own literature, the first eight tigers to arrive were cubs rescued from poachers, brought to the Temple by local villagers or by border police (see Table 1). There is no firm evidence to contradict this account. However, one of CWI's investigators was told by a member of Temple staff, who had been employed there for some two years, that he had heard from other staff that the tiger cubs had in fact been bought from a wildlife trader. CWI made direct contact with this trader who confirmed this claim. Unfortunately he is unwilling to make his evidence publicly available. For whatever reason, following the arrival of these first eight cubs, there are no other reports of rescued tigers arriving at the Temple.



Fig. 5. 2-3 month old tiger cub climbing the bars of its cage

There is no information about the genetic background of any of these animals - not even as to which tiger sub-species they belong to. Neither have the animals had their DNA tested. Four of the original animals (Phayu, Saifa, Sairung and Saengtawan) are still at the Temple; two have died, as recorded below - but the fate of Phayak and Mek is not explained on the Temple's website (see further information overleaf).



## Captive Breeding

Since the original arrivals, a substantial number of tigers have been bred at the Temple. The Temple's own website records that "Saengtawan gave birth to many cubs that now live in the monastery".

Of these, some are listed on the Temple's website in 2008, together with other cubs, as in Table 2.

Three other tigers, not now listed on the website, were listed in the Temple's 2005 information brochure as having been born there (see Table 3 and Fig. 6, p.13):

There is no first-hand information as to what has happened to these animals. However, two of these three animals disappeared during the time CWI investigators were present on the site. In each case, they were told by Temple staff that the animals had been exported to Laos.

Table 1: The Tiger Temple's original tigers<sup>1</sup>

Name	Sex	Date of Acquisition
unnamed	Female	1999 - died shortly after arrival
Phayu	Male	25/06/1999
Saifa	Male	25/06/1999
Phayak	Male	07/05/1999
Mek	Male	07/05/1999
Sairung	Female	26/09/1999
Saengtawan	Female	12/02/2000
Chomnapa	Female	1999 - died 2005

Table 2: Cubs born at the Tiger Temple<sup>1</sup>

Name	Date of birth	Sex	Parents
Hernfa	23/02/03	Male	Saifa & Saengtawan
Techo	2/08/04	Male	Phayu & Saengtawan
Fa Kram	4/12/04	Male	Phayu & Saengtawan
Fa Rung	4/12/04	Female	Phayu & Saengtawan
Chomnapa	12/09/05	Female	Phayu & Saengtawan
Fadang	12/09/05	Female	Phayu & Saengtawan
Rungdao	20/09/05	Female	Mek & Sairung
Harnfa	20/09/05	Male	Mek & Sairung

Given that the Temple does not have a licence to breed tigers, it is difficult to understand how or why there have been any births at the Temple at all. All adult tigers are kept in separate pens, apart from the time each day when they are led, individually chained, to the Canyon for display to the tourists.

For them to breed there must be a deliberate policy of putting male and female tigers together for this purpose. The Abbot, Pra Acharn Phusit (Chan) Khantitharo, told one of CWI's investigators that he "likes to have cubs at the temple all the time for the tourists".

Table 3: Cubs born at the Tiger Temple (listed in Tiger Temple's brochure, 2005)

Name	Date of birth	Sex	Parents	Notes
Darika	23/02/03	Female	Saifa & Saengtawan	Sister to Hernfa, disappeared July/August 2007
Famai	02/07/03	Male	Saifa & Saengtawan	No record beyond 2004
Vayu	02/08/04	Female	Phayu & Saengtawan	Sister to Techo, disappeared Aug 2007

## Illegal Trade

Exporting or importing tigers across international boundaries, including those between Thailand and Laos is illegal under CITES, unless appropriate permits have been issued. CITES requires that such permits are only issued for non-commercial exchanges between recognised scientific institutions for conservation purposes. There is no evidence that such permits have been issued to export tigers from the Temple - nor should there be, since the Temple is not registered with the Thai authorities as an appropriate institution.



Fig. 7. The tigress Dao Ruang

However, CWI investigators uncovered evidence indicating that a number of animals have both arrived at and left the Temple in international exchange or sales deals with a tiger breeding establishment in Laos.

Of the 11 tigers listed on the Temple's website in 2008, two have no indication as to their origin. Nanfa's birth date is given as 31/7/04, and Dao Ruang's birth date as 13/10/04. Unlike for the other tigers on the list, there is no information about the animals' origin or parentage.

A CWI investigator actually witnessed the arrival of Dao Ruang at the Temple on 23rd August 2005. She was brought in a small truck that arrived between 7:30 and 8:00 in the evening. After being removed from the truck, she was anaesthetised and a microchip was injected into her shoulder. Some paperwork was

produced by the Tiger Temple Project Manager and thereafter signed by the Abbot, the Project Manager, and the driver of the truck. The Project Manager told CWI's investigator that, Dao Ruang had come from Laos "for the exchange of genes."

CWI investigators found an agreement dated 23rd August 2005, which was signed by the Temple's Abbot and the owner of a tiger farm in Laos. Thinking that it was a legal permit for trade, the Foreign Manager also gave a copy of the same document to CWI's representative for S.E. Asia during a formal visit (see Fig. 9). The document states that it is agreed that Dao Ruang, identified by microchip, will be exchanged for the older male tiger Phayak, one of the original group of tigers brought to the Temple in 1999.

Phayak had already disappeared from the Temple, so that he could be replaced with Dao Ruang.

In similar fashion, Temple staff informed the investigators that Famai - another older male, born in 2003 - had been exchanged for Nanfa a young female, in May 2005.

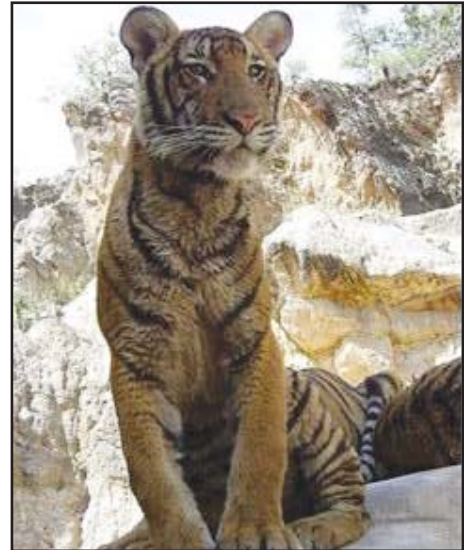


Fig. 8. The tigress Nanfa

**English translation of the agreement:**

**23 August 2005**

*The undersigned, Mr. Boonrueng Somswat is the owner of a female Indochinese tiger, born on 13th October 2004, named Dao Rueng, with Microchip no. LOT1797 116421656A, and wished to exchange this tiger with the male tiger, named Payak, born in 1999. The purpose of this exchange is for mating, so as to prevent the weakness in the species due to inbreeding. And Mr. Boonrueng Somswat, the owner of a tiger farm in DPR Laos, agrees to sign this contract for the objective of the tiger conservation. After the successful result the tiger will be exchanged back.*

**Boonrueng Somswat - Applicant**  
**Pra Acharn Phusit (Chan) Khantitharo - Acceptor**  
**Jakkrit Apisuthipongsakul - Foundation Manager**

Fig. 9. Agreement between Abbot and owner of Tiger Farm in Laos (Thai version)

According to information gathered from Temple staff, Nanfa had arrived from Laos in May 2005. It appears that Nanfa shared the same illegal origin as Dao Ruang.

The Abbot himself told the investigators later that "Dao Ruang and Nanfa were brought in for breeding for exchange of genes".

The case of Mek, another of the original 1999 arrivals, appears to involve similar illicit international trafficking. In 2005, when CWI investigators visited the Temple, Mek was held in a cage and on display to the public. However, in February 2006, investigators were informed by the Temple's Foreign Manager that the Abbot had told her that Mek was wanted by a tiger breeding establishment in Laos PDR. The investigators were able to confirm this with the Abbot directly. In response to the question whether Mek would be sent to Laos the Abbot replied "I have to. I am worried that if I don't, they will cause trouble for me". The following evening Mek was taken away.

It therefore appears that on at least three occasions, older (and no doubt by then less manageable) male tigers were exchanged for young females. Famai, Phayak and Mek are listed in the Temple's 2005 information brochure (e.g. see Fig. 6, Fig. 10 and Fig. 11, p.13), but there is no mention of them in subsequent editions.

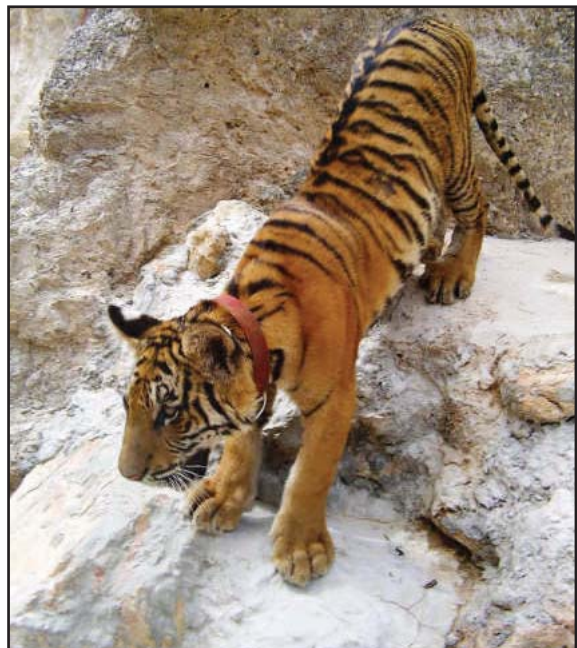


Fig. 12. The tigress Fa Rung disappeared from the Temple in August 2007

Three females; Darika, born at the Temple in 2003, Vayu, born in 2004, and Rung Dao, born in 2005, were present at the Temple when investigators kept track of the tigers between 2005 and early 2007. However, all three had disappeared when they returned to the Temple in August 2007.

According to staff, they had gone to Laos. Furthermore, on the evening of 18th August 2007, a van arrived at the Temple and took away Fa Rung, a 3 year old female (see Fig. 12). Clearly, there are frequent movements of animals between the tiger farm in Laos PDR and the Temple.

#### One investigator describes the event:

"At approximately 6:30pm, we headed to the outside of the temple to eat our dinner. At 7:15pm, a monk came and sat near our table. He carried a radio and did not speak to us. At approximately 7:30pm we left the outside area and headed back to our accommodation. As we arrived at the hut I turned and saw the monk looking through the gate at us in our accommodation. There was a radio call. I became very suspicious as all monks are supposed to be in meditation between 7 - 8pm each night. I knew something was going on, so did the other two volunteers. I asked them to let me know if they hear any vehicle movement. At approximately 7:45pm both volunteers heard a truck engine coming through the temple. The front gate was wide open. I rushed with my camera to get a photograph but the vehicle was too fast. The next morning I woke early and checked on the tigers. I arrived to find Fa Rung was not in her cage. She did not return to the temple."

CWI investigators uncovered evidence of what appears to be a deliberate strategy to conceal these changes from the public, presumably to support the perception of life-long care espoused by the Temple.

In August 2007, monks showed CWI investigators four new cubs, all of whom were only a few weeks old. Three were said to have been born at the Temple, but the fourth was said to have been brought in from elsewhere. All four had been given the names of tigers who had previously been at the Temple, but had since disappeared - Famai (i.e. Fig. 13, p.14), Phayak, Darika, and Fa Rung.

One monk also said that Harnfa (see Fig. 14, p.14), a male born at the Temple in 2005 had his name changed to Mek (another tiger from the group that had disappeared, as mentioned previously).

In April 2007, investigators noted that two 4-month-old cubs were taken from their mother Saengtawan and disappeared during the night. At the same time, two much younger (approx. 2 week old) male cubs arrived. Only one of the two animals survived, and in August 2007 investigators found that he had been named Harnfa Noi ("little Harnfa") in place of the original Harnfa.



Fig. 15. The tigress Saengtawan and her cubs. Source: www.tigertemple.org



Fig. 16. Kanchanaburi is close to the Thai - Myanmar border

## Breeding and Conservation

It is clear that the Tiger Temple is not a sanctuary for tiger cubs rescued from poachers, but a commercial tiger breeding centre. Most of the animals at the Temple now have either been bred on site or were brought in from the tiger farm in Laos.

The genetic background of these animals is entirely unknown. There is no DNA or other evidence to reliably indicate even to which sub-species these animals belong, let alone their individual pedigree.

Thailand forms part of the natural range of the Indo-Chinese tiger sub-species, *Panthera tigris corbetti*, but to the north and west, Thailand borders on Myanmar, which is within the range of the Bengal sub-species, *Panthera tigris tigris*. The Temple is not far from the western border (see Fig. 16). So animals obtained near these borders could be of either sub-species, or possibly hybrids.

Indo-Chinese tigers tend to be smaller than the Bengal subspecies, with a darker coat and shorter, narrower stripes which generally terminate in spots rather than rosettes. Despite these physical differences, there is no reliable way to distinguish between these two sub-species by appearance alone because there is considerable overlap between the two.<sup>10</sup> Molecular analysis of DNA is required to reliably identify the sub-species of a particular animal.<sup>11</sup>

No such DNA analysis has been successfully carried out on the tigers at the Temple, but from visual appearance (i.e. size and stripe pattern) there is reason to believe that both Phayu and Mek, two of the original males acquired in 1999, are either the Bengal sub-species or hybrid Bengal/Indo-Chinese while the other original animals, including all the females, appear more of the Indo-Chinese type.

As confirmed by the Temple's own website, Phayu and Mek have fathered all but one of the tigers that were born at the Temple and are still there now.

All these animals are therefore likely to be hybrids, which disqualifies them from participating in any conservation breeding programme seeking to rebuild wild populations. Similarly, so far as is known, there is no DNA evidence as to the genetic origins of tigers that have come from the tiger farm in Laos - another country within the natural range of the Indo-Chinese sub-species, but bordering on the range of the Bengal sub-species.

### Housing and Husbandry

Tigers have been kept in captivity around the world for a very long time, and there is a great deal of experience in appropriate housing and husbandry methods. Expert advice on the design of accommodation, proper environments, husbandry and care is readily available from books and the internet. But the facilities at the Tiger Temple do not even come close to the guidance given by any reputable source.

Wild tigers are essentially solitary animals, unless a female is with cubs, or a male and female occupy the same area. A minimum requirement for captivity must be an outside enclosure for each female or pair, large enough and with sufficient facilities for them to express normal behaviour, coupled to a sheltered den.

The World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA) recognises that legal requirements may vary from one country to another, but specifies that a minimum outdoor enclosure of 500m<sup>2</sup> per pair, or female with offspring if kept separate, should be provided. Enclosure enlargements of 50m<sup>2</sup> should be provided for each additional adult. Dens should, at the very least, contain an elevated resting place and fresh drinking water. There should be at least one den more than there are tigers in the enclosure, and the animals should have outdoor access all year round.

At the start of the investigation, all tigers at the Tiger Temple were housed in small cement-floor cages, which form the animals' only living space. The older accommodation consists of a row of eight inter-connected cages measuring 9m x 3.5m each and providing a mere 31.5m<sup>2</sup> for each tiger (see Fig. 17). There was also a group of four cages approximately measuring 3m<sup>2</sup> each, which were used principally to house young cubs or sometimes an adult pair in two inter-connected cages. This latter group of four cages was later largely disused and eventually demolished to make way for a new enclosure called 'Tiger Falls', which was completed in September 2007 (see Fig. 19).



Fig. 17. Tiger Temple staff posing for a photograph in one of the eight inter-connected cages



Fig. 18. Exterior view of Tiger Temple cages

Newer cages were built in the area designated for development of a so-called 'Tiger Island': two pairs in 2005 and a further two pairs subsequently. At 12.1m x 3.15m these cages are only slightly larger, and again are usually inter-connected in pairs. Occupied by 2 tigers, these cages offer just 38.12m<sup>2</sup> per animal. As of August 2007, the four paired cages housed Harnfa; Dao Ruang and Techo; Nunfa and Fa Kram; Sai Rung and Hernfa.

With the exception of the smaller 'cub cages', each cage had a small area at the back that can be closed off so that the tigers could be more closely confined, for example during cleaning times. Sometimes tigers were randomly locked into this small area for longer periods. When asked why this occurred, a Temple staff member replied that "the tigers are being punished".

Tigers were confined in their cages for 20 - 21 hours every day. Apart from occasions when one or two of the youngest tigers were allowed to wander around the Temple Sala or meeting platform during staff breakfast time, the only relief the animals had from their barren cages was the period each day when they were led out and tethered in the so-called 'Tiger Canyon' for display to tourists.

As well as being an appropriate size, cages for captive wild animals should also offer some structural interest and



Fig. 19. The new tiger exhibit called 'Tiger Falls'.  
Source: www.tigertemple.org

variety to enrich the lives of the animals that are kept there. WAZA recommends that for tigers, enclosures should contain visual barriers to enable the tigers to hide from one another, trees or logs for scratching, platforms for sitting on and overlooking a view (if possible, one in the shade and one in the sun), and a pool of reasonable size for bathing and swimming. A "tiger feeding pole" is also recommended. This is a thick pole about 6m high at the top of which meat is placed to encourage the tiger to climb and provide good exercise. Other options include the use of toys such as a plastic ball, wooden scratching posts, scents such as herb or spice extracts, or dung from potential prey species such as deer, and small items of food hidden around the cage.

None of these enrichments were adequately provided for the animals in the Temple cages, which are essentially simple concrete and steel boxes. A raised concrete platform is built into the front section, and a small, shallow concrete bath is included in the rear section, together with food and water bowls. Occasionally an old tyre or log is put into a cage.

At the time of the investigation between 2005 and August 2007, these cages encompassed the entire living facilities for the tigers at the Temple, apart from the few hours spent in the Canyon posing for tourists. By September 2007, a new enclosure was opened which does have some outdoor space - the Tiger Falls (see Fig. 19). But this enclosure only provides accommodation for three tigers. The remaining animals are still confined to the cages described above. There are only two dens (WAZA recommends four if three tigers are to occupy the space), and the outdoor enclosure of the Tiger Falls is only some 80 - 100m<sup>2</sup> - still far less than recommended by international standards, which are to be considered minimum requirements.

In 2003, the Temple announced the construction of new tiger enclosures in an area called 'Tiger Island'. These enclosures were to include an outdoor area and den for each tiger. Construction work began soon after, but little progress has been made.

By April 2006, a moat had been dug and six new paired cages were built. However, these cages are not in accordance with the original plans announced in 2003, and a decision was taken to stop work and demolish the cages. This demolition work was never carried out.

One of CWI's investigators was subsequently present at meetings between the Abbot, other Temple staff, a police captain and a team of architects to discuss the preparation of new, detailed blueprints based on the "master plan", but these plans never materialised.

The Temple's Website update of July 2007 indicates that the only work carried out so far has been the excavation of the perimeter moat, which is yet to be concreted to retain water.<sup>12</sup>

Each day, staff take some tigers from their cages and walk them on leashes to the 'Tiger Canyon' (see below for a description of this event). The Canyon has a pool that is large enough for the tigers to swim in and, in earlier years, if there were no tourists, the tigers were allowed off their leashes to bathe in the pool. More recently however, as tourist numbers grew and safety issues came to the fore, tigers were allowed to bathe less often. By March 2006, only young cubs were allowed in the pool. All other animals were chained in the display area for tourists to have their photograph taken with them.

Not all tigers were taken to the Canyon each day. Normally 10 or more tigers are taken, but some animals - such as the female Saengtawan (see Fig. 15 and Fig. 20) - are rarely, if ever, let out of their cage.



Fig. 20. The tigress Saengtawan, Jan 2008. Source: www.tigertemple.org

### Tiger Cubs

The investigation showed that breeding is a regular event at the Temple. It is impossible to say accurately how many tiger cubs have been born at the Temple or how many have survived to this day. Some cubs are certainly still at the Temple, whilst others have been removed or died. One of the original eight arrivals - Saengtawan, however, has had at least 7 litters in the 4 years between 2003 and 2006. There have also been occasional litters born to other females.

In the wild, cubs remain with their mother for more than a year. They first begin to take solid food after around 4 months and are fully weaned when 6 months old.<sup>13</sup> But at the Temple, cubs are routinely removed from their mother at an early age - normally less than 2 months. This brings the mother back into oestrus to conceive another litter. In 2004, Saengtawan produced two litters of cubs in the space of just 4 months.

If tiger cubs are removed from their mother before weaning, they should be fed a proprietary cat milk formula. This is a high-protein, high-fat milk, vital for proper early development of the body. As a short-term alternative, skimmed cows milk with added corn oil may also be used.<sup>14</sup>

At the Temple, however, human milk formula is used to feed the cubs. This low-protein, high-carbohydrate milk caused serious nutritional problems. While CWI investigators were at the Temple, at least two litters died, apparently of malnutrition.

Furthermore, extensive research has shown that early weaning has harmful long-term effects on offspring behaviour and health.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup>



Fig. 21. The cub Famai aged 2-3 weeks. Famai subsequently died

Cubs which had been brought to the Temple instead of being bred there were kept in a small, mesh-floored, metal cage close to the adult tigers' cages.

In April 2007, one of the investigators recorded the disappearance of Saengtawan's two 4-month-old female cubs during the night. They were replaced by two newly introduced 2-week-old male cubs, who were housed in a small cub-cage, about 1.5m from Saengtawan's own cage. Saengtawan became distressed and roared continuously which, in turn, must have been terrifying for the new cubs, one of which subsequently died.

Cubs were also at risk while they were with their mother. Investigators noted, that on at least two occasions, young cubs, which were able to climb from their mother's cage into any of the neighbouring cages, were killed by the female Darika. Darika herself disappeared from the Temple in 2007.

## Diet

The dietary needs of captive tigers are well established, with information readily available in published literature. Tigers should receive a diet high in protein and fat, which must contain adequate provisions of vitamins and other essential nutrients. Omega-6 fatty acid arachidonic acid and amino acid taurine are of particular importance<sup>8</sup>. Both are essential in the diet of all cats, as they are unable to synthesise these substances themselves. A deficiency of arachidonic acid affects the function of the brain and other parts of the nervous system, while taurine deficiency causes degeneration of the retina, the heart and other muscles.<sup>18</sup>

WAZA recommends that a tiger's diet should consist of full carcasses, including meat, bone, offal and skin. This should be supplemented with mineral salts and vitamins, as well as arachidonic acid and taurine.<sup>8</sup> Meat should normally be given raw to avoid the breakdown of essential vitamins and other nutrients.

When feeding poultry, it is important to be aware that all large cats, including tigers, are susceptible to virulent strains of avian influenza. Depending on body size and energy requirements, tigers will need a minimum of 3 to 4 kilogrammes of meat a day.

WAZA also recommends fasting tigers one or two days per week to add variety and stimulate appetite, compensated for by larger meals on other days.

At the Tiger Temple, the tigers' diet consists largely of incomplete chicken carcasses. The animals are also fed some pork or beef off-cuts, which are largely fat, plus occasional packets of commercial dog or cat food. All the tigers' food is cooked. This is a reasonable precaution in the case of chicken. In 2004, 147 of 441 tigers held at the Sriracha Tiger Zoo in Thailand died as a result of infection with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza, which came from poultry carcasses in their feed.<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 23. Tiger Temple staff prepare food for the tigers



## ฟ้าใหม่ (FAMAI - New Sky)

วันเดือนเกิด: 1 กรกฎาคม 2546 เพศ: ♂

สถานที่เกิด: วัดป่าหลวงตาบัว จุฬาลงกรณ์นิคม

**อุปนิสัย**  
 เพราะ "ฟ้าใหม่" เป็นสมาชิกล่าสุดในครอบครัวเสือ (เป็นลูกเสือครอกที่ 2 ที่เกิดจาก "สาธิตา" และ "แสงตะวัน") ดังนั้นมันจึงได้รับการเอาใจใส่เป็นพิเศษ มันเติบโตพร้อมกับความคุ้นเคยในการเป็น "ตัวโปรด" ของทุกคน จนเดี๋ยวนี้ก็ไม่ยอมแยกไหนๆ ง่ายๆ  
 มันแข็งแรงกว่าลูกเสือสองตัวในช่วงที่อายุเท่ากัน เพราะเป็นเพราะมันได้รับการเลี้ยงดูด้วยนมแม่ ฟ้าใหม่ค่อนข้างจะเป็นนักรู้ ไม่ยอมพลาดโอกาสที่จะแสบกระโจนใส่พี่ๆ ของมัน และไม่รู้ว่าอะไรก็ตามที่รวมกันมันแรงๆ

**Date of birth:** 1/07/03 **Sex:** Male

**Place of birth:** Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasompanno

**Character:**  
 As the latest addition to our tiger family, born in the second litter from "Saila" and "Soengtawan", he enjoys a lot of special attention. He grew so accustomed to being everyone's "favorite" that now he will accept no other treatment.  
 He appears stronger than the other two cubs of his age, probably due to him being reared on his mother's milk. He is quite a fighter. Never misses the opportunity to sneak up on his older siblings, and will not complain when they play roughly with him.



Fig. 6. The original Famai in the Temple's 2005 brochure, which states that the Famai was born at the Temple. This cub disappeared from the Temple in May 2005 and was replaced with another cub, also named Famai. The latter subsequently died

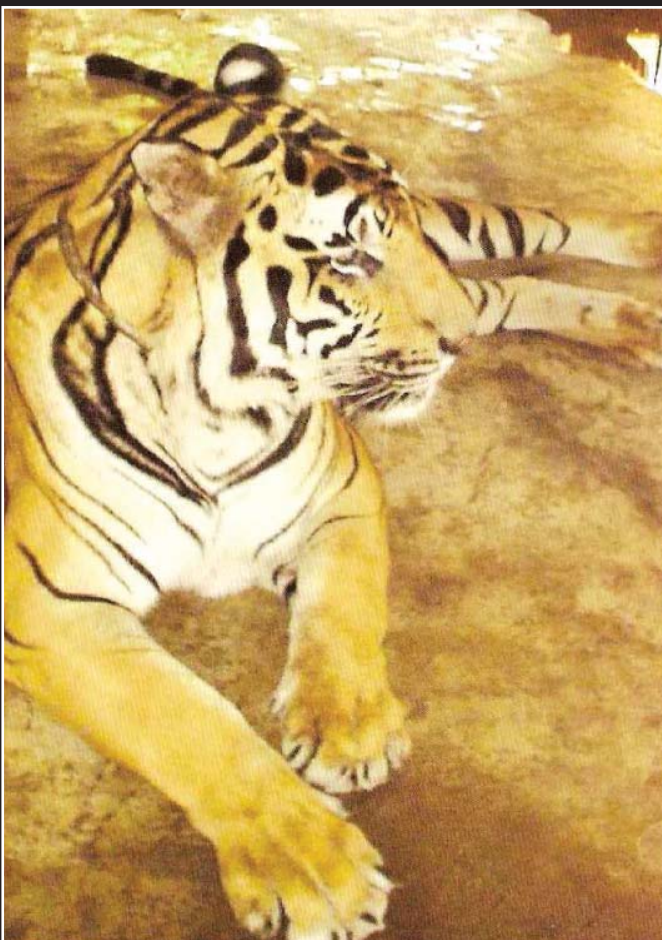


Fig. 11. The tiger Mek depicted in the Temple's 2005 information brochure. Mek disappeared in February 2006, reportedly moved to a tiger farm in Laos

Fig. 10. The tiger Phayak depicted in the Temple's 2005 information brochure. Phayak was replaced by Dao Ruang



Fig. 13. Cub replacing the original Famai. Also called Famai, this cub was born in early 2005. Both these cubs died a few weeks after this picture was taken. Source: [www.tigertemple.org](http://www.tigertemple.org)



Fig. 14. The tiger Harnfa was renamed Mek, after Mek had disappeared





Fig. 22. Six week old tiger cubs at the Temple



Fig. 25. Tiger Temple staff posing for a photograph



Fig. 32. The tiger Phayu



Fig. 34. The 'Tiger Canyon' offers no shade in temperatures which can climb above 40°C



Fig. 35. Young staff member posing for photograph



Fig. 38. Phayu and Saifa in the 'Tiger Canyon'.



Fig 44. Young boy sitting on a tiger's back, posing for a photograph



Fig. 24. Some tigers, like Phayu, were in very poor condition and appeared emaciated

However, a diet of cooked chicken supplemented only with poor quality pork or beef off-cuts puts the tigers at serious risk of malnutrition. Moreover, the quantity of food provided often fell well below the recommended minimum requirement of 3kg per day and was therefore qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate.

CWI Investigators found that meat was kept in freezers that were stacked to overflowing. This caused only lower levels to freeze properly. Meat was bought once a week. Therefore, by the end of each week, some of the food was decaying and putrid.

Each day, meat was boiled in salt water and cooked until there was no blood left. Excess salt is potentially harmful. Every morning the tigers received their food in concrete bowls in their dens. Any uneaten food was left until the following day, when the animals' bowls were simply rinsed without disinfectant, before the new food was introduced.

A veterinarian who accompanied CWI's S.E. Asia Director during a formal visit in November 2007 recommended adding a carnivore food supplement to improve the quality of the tigers' diet. However, staff thought it was expensive and difficult to store, and so did not use it regularly. In March 2008 CWI learned that the Temple had acquired a more efficient refrigerator suitable for storing such supplements, and this was followed by the initiation of a dietary supplement programme. This information however has not yet been verified.



Fig. 26. One of the Tiger Temple's monks straddling a chained tiger with a wooden stick in his hand

## Handling

Of all the concerns expressed by tourists who visited the Temple and reported their thoughts on Internet forums (e.g.<sup>20,21</sup>), probably the most frequent allegations relate to the abusive handling of tigers in their cages or in the 'Tiger Canyon'. CWI Investigators themselves witnessed numerous incidences of physical mistreatment and abuse first-hand. Video evidence was collected and additional video clips have been posted on the Internet.<sup>22</sup>

To establish and maintain dominance over the tigers so that the animals can be controlled, Temple staff regularly subject the animals to different forms of violence and abuse. Examples observed by CWI Investigators include:

### Nanfa's Case

Nanfa is a 20-month-old tigress. On the way to and from the Canyon, her regular handler used a double ended lead with a heavy dog clip on each end. Whenever Nanfa stopped the handler would strike Nanfa on the head with the free dog clip to get her to move again.

When Nanfa managed to get away from the handler on one occasion, she was punished by being beaten on the head with a large metal patio umbrella pole for approx. ten minutes. A second member of staff looked on, laughing.

### Techo's Case

In another incident, Techo, a 2 year old male, was being walked to the Canyon on a very hot day, when he stopped in the shade of a tree and refused to move. To get him to move, Techo was hit on the head with a rock and with a rod on the nose and paws. Staff also threw a rock at his stomach.

### Harnfa's Case

In May 2007, one of CWI's investigators helped to clean out Harnfa's cage. This involved the use of a squeegee mop, with which Harnfa began to play. During play Harnfa managed to pull off the end of the squeegee. As soon as the tiger saw the stick end of the squeegee in the investigator's hand rather than a sponge, Harnfa dropped to the ground, cowering with his eyes tightly closed and cringing backwards as if expecting a beating. The investigator asked two other volunteers why the tiger had acted like this, and they both said: "Harnfa has been beaten



Fig. 27. The Temple's Abbot beating two tigers with a large wooden stick



Fig. 28. Aggressive behaviour in the 'Tiger Canyon'



Fig. 29 Two Tiger Temple staff manhandle a tiger, pulling the animal by its tail



Fig. 30. Staff member kneeling a tiger in the flank

**Abusive behaviour from Temple staff, much of it recorded in photographs or on video, includes:**

- Twisting the tigers noses
- Pulling ears and whiskers
- Tail twisting and dragging the whole animal around by tail in order to get tigers to move to a desired position (see Fig. 29)
- Kicking and kneeling the tigers' flanks (see Fig. 30)

many times with wooden poles and branches; he thought you were going to beat him". The following day Harnfa had fresh marks across his back, apparently from being beaten again.

Other volunteers at the Temple who had witnessed incidents of abuse also reported these to the investigators. For example:

"On the 22nd of July 2006, Nanfa jumped off the rock she was sitting on and started to walk away. She was followed by a tiger handler called Karn who climbed on top of her and forcibly punched her in the face at least five times" The volunteer also described her concerns and the incident to an international animal welfare NGO.

The Abbot, who manages the daily walk to the Canyon for the tourists, exacerbates the problem of beating the tigers by expecting the animals to be taken to the Canyon quickly. If the tigers stop, play up or are too slow to reach where they are wanted, the Abbot shouts at and berates the staff. The staff in turn take a hard line with the tigers to keep them moving. The demands of displaying the tigers to paying tourists appear to override any considerations for the tigers' welfare.

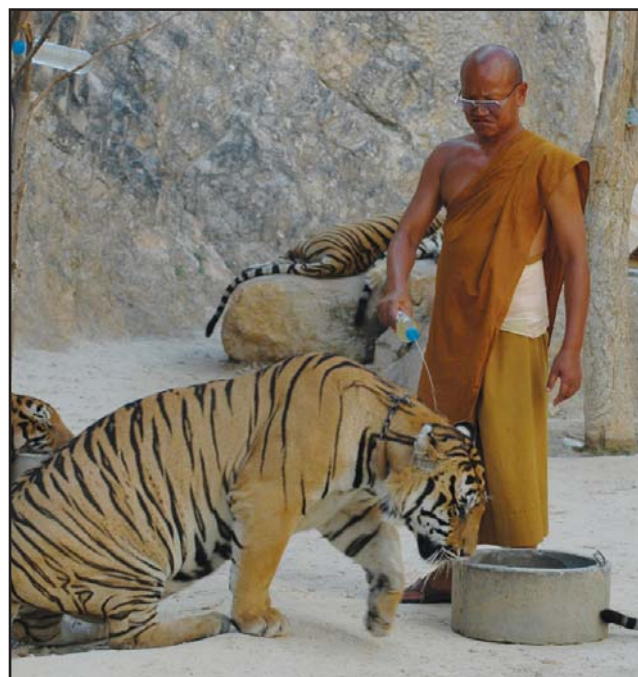


Fig. 31. The Temple's Abbot sprays tiger urine into a tiger's face, inducing a fear-based submissive response

In one instance observed by an investigator, the Abbot wanted 8 year old male Phayu (see Fig. 32, p.15) to be taken to the Canyon. Phayu did not want to leave his cage so the Abbot shouted at the staff members handling him until they managed to force him out.

Phayu growled and was very aggressive, even lunging at staff members. When he arrived at the Canyon Phayu picked a fight with Saifa, another 8 year old male. One of the staff members who had walked Phayu to the Canyon used a metal umbrella pole to strike Phayu forcibly across the side of his body.

Apart from beatings, the tigers frequently endure many other forms of abuse. An incident witnessed repeatedly by investigators involved a male tiger called Hernfa. Hernfa was brought down to the tourists prior to going to the canyon

and was chained to a tree to allow tourists to get a better look at him. A young member of staff came up behind Hernfa to grab and squash the tiger's testicles. This is sometimes even done in front of a tourist. As stated earlier, Temple staff always stay close to the tigers, often in a threatening stance, and regularly squirt tiger urine into the animals' face from a bottle at close quarters (Fig. 31 and Fig. 36). This is an extremely aggressive gesture explained later in this report.

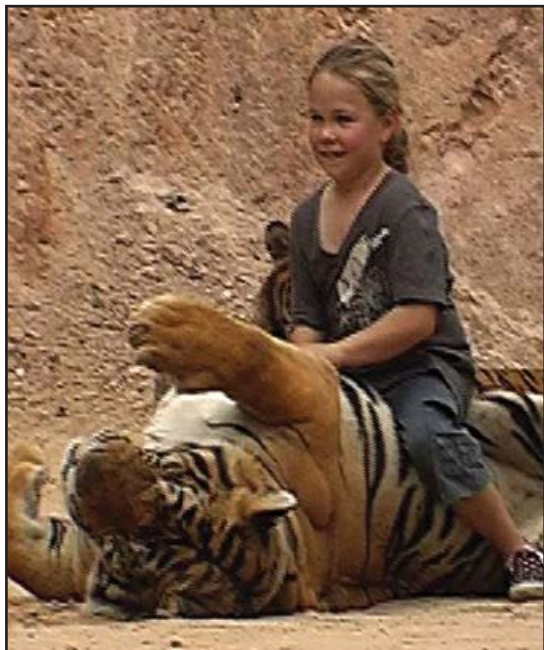


Fig. 33. Children are actively encouraged to sit and lie on the tigers during photo sessions

### Tiger Canyon Display

The most remarkable feature the Temple offers to tourists and undoubtedly the reason it has received so much publicity, is the daily Canyon display. Each day, between 1pm and 4pm, an average of ten tigers are placed on public display. At 1pm, most, but not all, of the tigers are taken from their cages by staff and walked the short distance across the Temple compound to an area known as 'Tiger Canyon' on a leash.

The Canyon is in fact part of an old quarry and consists of a flat arena surrounded by rock walls. Here, the tigers are chained in fixed positions on short 3 - 5 metre chains attached to a heavy collar as tourist displays. For an additional 'donation' visitors can also have their photograph taken with a tiger.

Early on during CWI's investigation in 2005, the tigers were allowed some "free time" with access to a large pool at the back of the arena, before being forced to pose for the tourists. However, this practice had stopped by 2006 for all but a few of the youngest cubs. All larger animals remained chained up for the whole 3 - 4 hour display period, which includes the hottest part of the day. The canyon is virtually without shade (see Fig. 34, p.16) and afternoon temperatures can climb above 40 °C in the full sun.

Throughout this period, the Temple's tigers are forced to perform for visiting tourists. Punching, tail-pulling, and other forms of physical abuse are routine, as is propping the animals up with heavy concrete bowls placed closely on either side of the tigers' body. This is to force the tigers to present the required poses for tourist photographs (mostly a "sitting erect" posture).

Although there are occasional displays of aggression between the tigers or directed at humans, the low frequency of such behaviour is remarkable.



Fig. 36. Staff member collects urine from a tiger using a plastic bottle

It appears that this degree of docility is achieved through ruthlessly enforced dominance by the handlers, who use various abusive practices, including those described in the previous section. Despite the close proximity of tourists, instances of forceful nose-twisting, pulling or dragging by the tail, kicking and kneeling are regularly seen, and have been documented on film.

Less obviously cruel, although in all probability equally distressing to the tigers, is the routine use of dilute tiger urine sprayed in the tigers' faces to subdue them (see Fig. 31 and Fig. 36). In the wild tigers spray their urine on to trees, rocks and other objects to mark their territories.

The scent provides other tigers not just with geographic information about territory, but also with physiological information, such as the sex and reproductive status of individuals.

Tigers are solitary animals and use these spray-mark signatures to remotely communicate and maintain their distance from each other. Urine sprayed in the face is likely to be perceived by a tiger as a highly aggressive display from a hyper-dominant animal, and so will induce a fear-based submissive response and stress.

This is also what was observed and documented on film at the Tiger Temple. If an animal is not compliant during the tourist display period by refusing to adopt a desired position, or by showing aggression towards a handler, urine is sprayed in its face from a bottle, which staff members carry. In response to this the tigers immediately appear more docile.

The Temple's own literature does not report any attacks by the tigers on people. However, CWI investigators observed several instances of attacks on both staff members and volunteers.

There are also a number of unconfirmed reports of injuries resulting from tigers attacking staff and visitors. Some of these incidents involved injuries severe enough to require a visit to the hospital, yet the apparent absence of any serious or life-threatening attacks since the Temple began its daily 'tourist interaction' programme in the canyon is surprising.

Some observers who have commented on the Internet<sup>23,24</sup> suggest that the tigers must be drugged to maintain such low levels of aggression in close proximity to so many unfamiliar humans.

Certainly, the animals appear most docile early in the afternoon session, and become more restless as the day wears on. The Abbot and Temple staff deny the use of any drugs<sup>25</sup> and maintain that the tigers' sluggish behaviour in the early afternoon, as well as their subsequent rise in activity, simply reflects natural resting patterns.

Whilst CWI Investigators found no evidence of drug use, such evidence could easily be concealed by a small number of staff with primary responsibility for managing the tigers.

## Behaviour

As noted earlier in this report, tigers in the wild occupy large territories, are largely solitary, and travel long distances every day. Frustrating these natural traits and behaviours through close confinement, forced social contact and lack of exercise causes considerable stress, which often results in pathological disorders.

The likelihood of abnormal behaviour occurring, including stereotypic behaviour, can be reduced by enriching the captive environment with features designed to fulfil the tigers' needs in other ways.

Examples include larger space allowance to provide room for exercise, multiple dens and/or visual barriers to allow the animals to withdraw from public view or the close proximity of other tigers, varied changes to the environment such as new branch-wood or toys, placing animal or plant scent-marks, hiding food items etc, on a regular basis. None of this is done at the Tiger Temple.



Fig. 37. Tigers are confined inside barren cells for 21 hours a day and only leave to be chained up tightly for display and tourist photo sessions in the 'Tiger Canyon'

The tigers remain in barren cages for most of the day, undergo a short walk to and from the Canyon on a leash as their only exercise, and are faced with the stresses of brutal handling techniques, being chained to a fixed spot for several hours, and the close proximity of often several hundred unfamiliar people.

Not surprisingly the tigers frequently display stereotypic behaviour, which can be clearly seen on video footage. It includes pacing for long periods on fixed, short routes within the confinement of a cage or at the end of a chain tether in the Canyon, and the constant self-chewing of paws.

Tigers also often show aggressive and fearful behaviour towards one or more staff members, growling and cowering, particularly when the person raises a hand. Such behaviour is often directed towards the staff member most often in charge of that particular tiger and is likely to indicate that the animal is not content in the presence of that person.

## Veterinary Treatment

Although the Temple does have regular access to a veterinarian, he is not a carnivore specialist. Veterinary treatment appears to be somewhat haphazard and is not always timely. Occasional visits by external veterinary experts have had some beneficial effects, but these occasions are few and far between.

CWI Investigators have viewed some of the Temple's clinical records, from which the following points emerged:

- All tigers have received routine vaccinations against common diseases including rabies, panleukopaenia, rhinotracheitis, and calicivirus. But most tigers have only received one complete veterinary check-up during their time at the Temple.
- Harnfa, a male tiger born in 2005, was (by February 2006) found to have badly worn and infected lower canine teeth - one with the pulp cavity exposed. The infection persisted despite treatment with antibiotics, and the tooth was finally removed in May 2006. Such tooth wear early in life indicates calcium deficiency. In December 2006 a visiting expert vet from Khao Khoew Zoo found malformation of the hind legs, which is also indicative of insufficient calcium in a cub's diet.



Fig. 39. The tiger Harnfa with a swollen and infected lower jaw

- In December 2006 it was recorded that the male tiger Techo suffered from infection in his right ear. The animal was showing signs of pain, including being irritable and aggressive towards staff. However, there are no records of any treatment. Almost one month later, a visiting veterinarian examined the ear and prescribed antibiotic treatment.
- In August 2006, there was evidence of pus in both eyes of the female Sai Rung, who also appeared to be in discomfort. September records indicate a viral infection with a secondary bacterial infection, and antibiotics were prescribed. In November 2006, a visiting vet noted conjunctivitis and recommended a different antibiotic treatment. In January 2007, six months later, Sai Rung finally underwent surgery by an eye specialist to remove growths from both eyes.

Antibiotic eye drops were prescribed post-operatively. One week later Sai Rung's left eye was healing well but her right eye was ulcerated. Treatment continued with the same eye drops.

Twelve months later, in August 2007, a CWI investigator photographed Sai Rung still clearly with sore eyes. The Temple's Foreign Manager told the investigator that the Abbot had refused further veterinary treatment for Sai Rung because he had already spent too much money on her.

## Funding

A shortage of funds is unlikely to be the cause of the poor care and ill-treatment of the Temple's tigers. In June 2005, an entrance 'donation' of 200 Baht - the equivalent of approx £3.00 - was paid by an average of 80 tourists each day. In September 2005, entrance fees rose to 300 Baht (approx £5.00) as more visitors began to arrive. By November 2005 visitors averaged 300 per day. In August 2006, the maximum number of visitors recorded on any given one day was a massive 600. In addition to entrance 'donations', a further compulsory 'donation' of 1000 Baht (approx £16.00) is required from tourists wishing to have their photograph taken while holding a tiger's head in their lap. At least 45 such photos are taken every day.

Using average attendance figures for 2005/06 and making no allowance for additional voluntary donations or smaller donations for photo sessions not involving holding a tiger's head in lap, the Temple's income from tourism must be some £750,000 - £800,000 Sterling or US\$1.5 - 1.6 million US (45 - 50 million Baht) a year.



Fig. 40. The Tiger Temple does not accept any responsibility for visitor safety and also asks tourists to sign a disclaimer

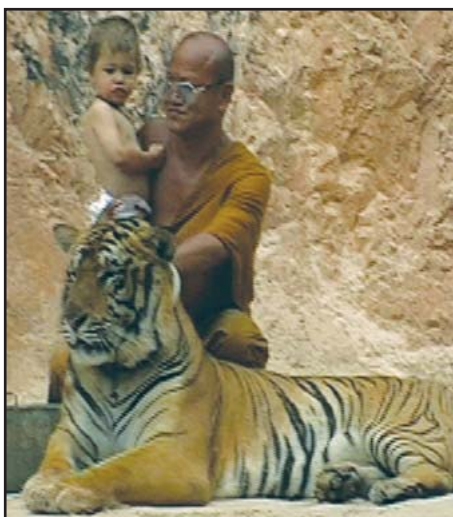


Fig. 41. The Abbot posing with a young child and a tiger

## High Risk Interactions Between Visitors and Tigers

The circumstances described in this investigation also give rise to alarm about the safety of Tiger Temple visitors. Although the Temple's own publicity material makes no reference to the dangers of exposing tigers and humans to close proximity or of any recorded attacks, CWI's investigators repeatedly witnessed aggressive behaviour towards visitors, particularly from Dao Ruang.

In one incident, a Thai woman who came with her partner to help raise funds for the Temple, put her hand into Dao Ruang's cage to pet her. Dao turned and took hold of the woman's hand with her mouth. When the frightened woman tried to pull her hand away, Dao Ruang bit through it and held on.

The woman's partner came over and hit Dao Ruang on her head. Dao Ruang released the hand, which was badly torn between her 3rd and 4th fingers and required numerous stitches to close the wound.

On other occasions, investigators observed Dao Ruang attacking staff and volunteers. One resulted in an injured finger, which needing suturing, another a French volunteer whose shirt was ripped, narrowly missing her neck and another a Danish volunteer who was tackled to the ground by Dao Ruang and bitten on the leg. The resulting injury got infected, and the volunteer needed medical treatment at a hospital.

The Temple explicitly renounces any responsibility for injuries or damage by asking visitors to sign a disclaimer at the entrance. Yet there are countless well documented and sometimes fatal attacks on humans by 'trained' and apparently mild-mannered captive wild cats from

around the world.<sup>26, 27</sup> These include attacks during photography sessions.

At the temple each year, thousands of visitors, some very young children, are actively encouraged to make close physical contact with the tigers during daily photo sessions (see Fig. 33, Fig. 41 and Fig. 44, p.14). Tourists place their arm around tigers' head or neck and children are placed on their backs, stomachs or by their sides. Staff even fail to prevent direct contact with the tigers when they are behaving aggressively and are also ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with potential emergency situations.

During an interview with a journalist in January 2008, the Abbot was asked why the tigers do not bite. The Abbot replied "They want to bite. One day they will bite."



Fig. 42. Tourists queuing at 'Tiger Canyon' to be photographed with the tigers. 100-300 tourists visit the Temple each day, but numbers can grow to almost 900 on busy days

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is possible that the Kanchanaburi Tiger Temple started with the good intention of providing emergency accommodation for tiger cubs who had been rescued from poachers. However, it would appear that commercial interests have long since overtaken these considerations. Subsequent construction, breeding, and illegal exchange activities appear to have been developed almost entirely with tourism in mind, rather than to benefit the needs of tigers.

- The animal welfare problems at the Temple are severe and include poor accommodation, lack of appropriate environments, veterinary problems, and deliberate physical abuse of the tigers to make them compliant for visiting tourists.



Fig. 43. Tourists are encouraged to get close to the chained up tigers. Captive and hand-reared big cats are known to attack people, causing serious injury or death

- The Tiger Temple makes no discernable contribution to tiger conservation and does not meet any of the requirements of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) for participation in a captive conservation breeding programme. The genetic makeup of the Temple's tigers is unknown, and the captive environment does not in any way approach the WAZA's minimum requirements. The Temple therefore would not be permitted to participate in any recognised conservation breeding programme.

- Evidence of illegal movements of tigers across international borders by Temple staff is now uncovered. At least 12 have been shipped across international borders without the necessary permits. International trade in tigers and their parts is the main cause of the species' demise in the wild.

### Care for the Wild Recommends:

To address the animal welfare and conservation issues identified in this report, CWI makes the following recommendations.

- that Thailand's Department of National Parks confiscates the Temple's illegally held tigers and transfers them to a sanctuary facility, where the animals can be accommodated and cared for appropriately. CWI has identified a suitable facility in Thailand and is offering its full support for this operation.
- that all photo sessions and physical contact with visitors is stopped immediately.
- the immediate cessation of all illegal tiger trade, exchange and transfer activities.
- halting all tiger breeding activities with immediate effect.



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