

Animals in danger

Tigers – almost extinct



Facts about tigers

1. Tigers are the largest wild cats in the world. Adults can weigh up to 363kg (that's about the same as 10 ten-year-old children!), and measure up to 3.3metres!
2. Tigers are carnivores, eating only meat. They mainly feed on large mammals such as deer, wild pigs, antelope and buffalo.
3. Tigers are solitary hunters, and generally search for food alone at night. They quietly stalk their prey until they are close enough to pounce – then they kill their victim with a bite to the neck or back of the head.
4. Tigers are good swimmers! Unlike most members of the cat family, they like water and often cool off in pools or streams.
5. A tiger's roar can be heard as far as three kilometres away.

6. At full speed, tigers can reach up to 65km/h. They may be big and heavy, but tigers are by no means slow movers!

7. Tigers are orange with black stripes. No two tigers have the same stripes. Since every tiger has their own pattern on their fur, they are all unique!

8. Less than 100 years ago, tigers could be found throughout Asia. Sadly, hunting and habitat loss have put populations at risk, and today their range has been reduced to around 7% of its former size. That's why we need to do all we can to protect these beautiful animals!

9. A tiger cub quadruples in size in the first month after its birth.

10. Tiger teeth can be 10cm long.

Source: National Geographic for kids

Different kinds of tigers

Today, there are five kinds of tigers living in the world today:

- the Bengal tiger (lives in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan – about 2,500 living in the wild)
- the South China tiger (extinct in the wild and now only found in zoos)
- the Indochinese tiger (lives in South East Asia - probably extinct in the wild)
- the Sumatran tiger (lives in Indonesia – about 400 still living in the wild)
- the Siberian tiger (lives in snow country Russia, Northern China and North Korea -about 500 still living in the wild)

Sadly, three kinds of tigers have become extinct:

- the Caspian Tiger (from Turkey, Afghanistan and Western China)
- the Bali and Javan tigers (from Indonesia.)



The Bengal Tiger

The Bengal Tiger is the national animal of India and Bangladesh, and can even be seen on Bangladeshi money! Their canine teeth are 10cm long - the largest teeth of any living cat.

They are powerful hunters, most active at dusk and dawn, when they use tall grass and trees to stalk prey and silently attack. They hunt water buffalo, deer and wild boar. They are capable of eating up to 40kg in one sitting but don't do this very often!

The main threats facing the Bengal Tiger are poaching and habitat loss.

In India and Nepal there are 11 main protected areas set apart to protect prime Bengal Tiger habitat. The Tiger Project, established in the 1970's, has helped stabilize Bengal Tiger populations in these reserve areas although overall populations are still decreasing.

The Wildlife Protection Society of India watches over any poaching activity, although locating the source of poaching operations is difficult.



The Indo-Chinese tiger

The Indo-Chinese tiger once lived in the wild in the following countries: Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos and Vietnam.

Today however, there only small numbers left in the world. They live in Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. No Indo-Chinese tiger has been seen in the wild since 2010.

Tiger farming has helped to stop the tiger from becoming extinct. In Vietnam, as of June 2022, there are a total of 372 of these tigers recorded. They live in captivity, in tiger farms or zoos.

The Sumatran Tiger

Sumatran tigers live only on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Tigers on the neighboring islands of Java, Bali, and Singapore became extinct in the 20th century.

The Sumatran Tiger is the smallest tiger species in the world. The adult male tiger is about 2.5 metres in length.

This beautiful cat has narrow black stripes.

The Sumatran Tiger the darkest colour of tiger species.

They have long whiskers.

They have extra fur around their face which protects them in dense vegetation.

They have white spots on the back of their ears.

They have webbed toes to help them swim through rivers

They have sharp claws to grip prey and climb trees.

Sumatran Tiger in danger

Sumatran Tigers are carnivores and eat mainly of deer, wild boars, monkeys and birds. They also prey on farmers' goats and cattle. This is a problem because farmers will try to shoot the tigers.

Humans are destroying their habitat and poaching them for their fur and other body parts. Tiger bones, skulls, canine teeth, whiskers, and skins are sold for high prices, to be used as ornaments or in Chinese medicine.

Sumatran rain forests are being cleared to make way for palm oil plantations. This means that this critically endangered tiger may soon vanish from the planet.

Another serious issue facing tigers are snares placed in the rainforest where tigers live. Often these rope or wire snares are set by villagers to catch wild pigs or deer to eat. However, tigers can become severely injured and maimed from these snares and die from infection.

Siberian Tiger

Siberian Tigers are the largest tigers in the world. They live in eastern Russia's birch forests, and there are some in China and North Korea as well. It is estimated that there are around 400 to 500 Siberian tigers left in the wild.

They can grow up to 3 meters in length. To keep themselves from becoming cold in the winters, Siberian tigers have thicker fur coats than other tigers. They also have a thick layer of fat which helps keep them warm. Like all other tigers, Siberian tigers have orange fur with black stripes. Siberian tigers have extra fur around their necks and paws which helps them keep warm. Siberian tigers have less orange in their coats, and have fewer stripes.

Since Siberian tigers live in such cold regions, an adult need to eat at least 9 kilograms of food every day to survive, but adults can eat as much as 50 kilograms of meat. Siberian tigers feed mainly on wild boar, elk and deer, but they also eat lynx and even bears. If the tiger cannot find larger prey it instead feeds on fish, rodents and rabbits.

Zolushka the Siberian Tiger – a story with a happy ending

Here's a true story about how an orphaned Siberian Tiger cub was rescued...

A Siberian tiger cub padded through a snowy forest in eastern Russia, battling against freezing gusts of wind. It had been days since the baby's mother left the den to hunt for food.

Now searching for her mum in the woods, the cub became so cold that her fluffy tail had gone completely numb. Without help, the cub would not make it. Too tired to go on, the cub dropped to the ground, and her body sank into the freezing snow.

Two men hiking through the forest noticed an orange lump poking out of the snow. As they approached, they realized that was a baby tiger. The men expected the cub to leap up and run away. But she lay completely still, barely breathing. The men knew the cub was in big trouble. They wrapped her in a blanket. Then they rushed her to the home of a local wildlife official, who took the tiger cub from the men's arms. He saw that the cub was extremely thin, and her tail was frostbitten. (Frostbite is when the skin freezes).

The wildlife official carried the tiger to his outdoor sauna. That's a heated relaxation room. He gently placed her inside. He fed the cub some warm milk, raw eggs, and meat. Then he phoned the Wildlife Conservation Society, which had a rescue centre nearby. Dale, who worked at the organisation, arrived to examine the cub. He estimated that she was about four months old. "Wild tiger mums care for their young until they're one and a half years old," he said, "So this baby's mother was probably killed by a poacher." He also believed the cub was found just in time.

"She wouldn't have survived another day on her own," he said.

After getting the cub checked over by a team of vets, the Wildlife Conservation Society decided to keep the 16kg cub in their centre until her condition improved.

Within two weeks the cub regained her strength. But her tail was so damaged by frostbite that it could cause a deadly infection. So a team of vets came to the cub's enclosure, tranquilized the animal and performed an operation to remove the injured part of the tail. Then the sleepy cub was loaded into a car and driven to a Siberian tiger rehabilitation centre 80km away. At this centre she was given a new name – Zolushka, which is Russian for Cinderella.

Zolushka was put in a large fenced enclosure. The fences were covered with sheets so the cub couldn't see the people looking after her. "This will stop her from getting attached to humans," Dale said. "Otherwise, it will be too hard for her to go back into the wild."

In order to develop the tiger's hunting skills, her keepers released live hares, (a kind of large rabbit), into the enclosure. Then they watched her from an observation tower. "Even without her mother to teach her, Zolushka had the instinct to hunt for food. After the tiger became good at catching hares, some harder-to-hunt animals such as wild boar were let loose in the enclosure. She soon became skilled at capturing all kinds of prey. The tiger seemed to enjoy romping around her new home.

The following spring, 18-month-old Zolushka weighed more than 91kg (as heavy as three ten-year-old children), and she could hunt like a wild tiger. The time came to set her free. The staff at the animal shelter decided to sedate the tiger and place her in a crate. Then they drove for 14 hours to a protected nature reserve, where Zolushka would be released. At the site, the keepers slid open the crate door.

The tiger leaped to the ground and bolted into the thick brush. "Zolushka is back where she belongs," said Dale. "It's story with a very happy ending!"

Langka and Barani – the true stories of two Sumatran tigers

Langka means 'rare' in Indonesian and Sumatran tigers are indeed rare and facing extinction. Langka lives in the hilly southern tip of the Bukit Tigapuluh National Park on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Langka is one of several tigers that wildlife rangers are tracking and monitoring.

Langka is a female tiger who will soon have cubs. When the cubs are about six months old, they will accompany her on hunting expeditions so they can feed directly on the kill. In the following months, they will slowly learn how to hunt and kill their own prey. By 16 months of age, tigers have fully developed canine teeth, but they are not very efficient at killing prey. By 18 months of age, the young tigers will start making their own kills. At this age males will leave their mother to establish their own territory. Females tend to stay longer with their mother than males.



Berani is a stunning male tiger, who also lives in the hilly southern tip of the Bukit Tigapuluh National Park. His name means ‘brave’ in Indonesian. He is another tiger in the National Park being carefully watched by the wildlife rangers. “The Sumatran tiger faces extinction in the near future if we do not act to save them,” says the ranger. “We hope their bravery helps them to win this battle.”

The goal is to protect Berani, his territory and prey, so he can survive and produce cubs for the next generation of tigers in the National Park.

The young male tiger faces his most challenging time when he leaves his mother and seeks to find his own territory. This usually occurs when the older dominant male gets too old or suffers severe injury.

The International Tiger Project allows people to ‘adopt a tiger’ like Langka or Barani. This does not mean that they can take the tiger home as a pet, but it means that the person agrees to give a certain amount of money every month so that a tiger can be under the care of the rangers in the National Park.

<https://www.tiger.org.au/adoption/adopt/langka/>