

TIGERS



Part of the big cat family, there are six living subspecies of tiger: Amur (Siberian) tiger, Bengal tiger, Indochinese tiger, Malayan tiger, South China tiger and Sumatran tiger. The three extinct subspecies of tiger are: Bali tiger, Caspian tiger and Javan tiger.

LATIN NAME: *Panthera* tigris*

POPULATION:

There are only around 3,800 tigers left in the wild:

- Amur tiger - 450
- Bengal tiger - less than 2,000
- Indochinese tiger - 750-1,300
- Malayan tiger- 600-800
- South China tiger- most probably extinct in the wild.
- Sumatran tiger - 400-500

WHERE TO FIND THEM:

The Amur tiger lives in colder places like eastern Russia and north-eastern China, the other tiger subspecies live in warmer climates in South East Asia, such as India, Nepal, Cambodia and Vietnam, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

HABITATS:

Tigers can live in lots of different habitats: grasslands, woodlands, mangroves and tropical forests.

IUCN STATUS: *Endangered**

*The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

EX	EW	CE	EN	VU	NT	LC
EXTINCT	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	ENDANGERED	VULNERABLE	NEAR THREATENED	LEAST CONCERNED

LIFESPAN: The oldest known wild tiger was 26, usually wild tigers live for around 10 years.

SIZE: Length: 2.2 metres - 3.7 metres (males are larger than females) Weight: 65kg- 300kg

DIET: Tigers are carnivores which means that they eat meat. They mainly eat large hooved mammals such as deer, antelope, and water buffalo, but they will also eat wild pigs and have been known to hunt dogs, crocodiles and pythons.

A group of tigers are called an ambush or a streak.

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COMMUNICATION:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Tigers let other tigers know that an area is their space by leaving scratch marks on trees with their claws, they also spray wee so that other tigers will smell it and know the space belongs to that tiger. Tigers will also rub their heads against trees and rocks to leave their smell. When other tigers smell these, they know that another tiger lives there.

Sounds: although they prefer to live alone, tigers still want to, and need to, communicate with other tigers about when they are ready to mate and where the boundaries of their territories are. Tigers communicate through a variety of sounds, including their roar which can be heard up to 3km away, and through much quieter chuffing noises, which they use to greet other tigers. Tigers can also communicate using infrasound. Humans cannot hear infrasound, it can pass through vegetation and is useful for communicating in a forest or mountainous environments.

Tails: the position of their tails also helps them to communicate with other tigers, a relaxed tiger has a relaxed hanging tail, if a tiger is feeling aggressive it will swish its tail from side-to-side.

Scratch marks: tigers use their claws to make scratch marks in tree bark to let other tigers know it is their territory, this behaviour also helps keep their claws clean and sharp.

Scent: they will also mark their territory with urine and sometimes with faeces. Tigers have scent glands in their whiskers, cheeks, lips, chin, tail, anus and between the pads on their paws, they rub these scent glands on rocks and trees to mark their territory. Tiger cubs can follow their mother's scent from the trail she leaves from glands in between her paw pads.

Tiger stripes are also found on their skin. The unique pattern of stripes acts like their identity.



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BEHAVIOUR:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Tigers like to live by themselves, unless it is a mother tiger and her cubs. They catch the animals that they want to eat by stalking them very slowly and quietly until they are near enough to pounce with their long, strong hind legs. Tigers love water and are very good swimmers. Lying in pools of water helps them to cool off on hot days.

Solitary: tigers spend most of their lives living alone, apart from during the mating season and when mother tigers are rearing cubs. They are occasionally seen sharing kills with other tigers that they have met or mated with before.

Territorial: tigers are territorial, male tigers have a patch of around 100km², female tigers patrol an area around 20km². A male tiger's territory may overlap with several females.

Hunting: tigers are *ambush** hunters, they stalk their prey very patiently, sometimes for up to 30 minutes, to get as close as possible before pouncing. They use their whiskers to detect wind direction, ensuring that the wind is not blowing their scent towards their prey, so as not to give away their presence! Their long, strong hind legs enable them to pounce nine metres. They can run fast (up to 65km per hour) but only for short periods of time. Even with their fantastic hunting skills, only one in twenty hunts results in a kill and a meal for the hungry tiger.

Crepuscular: they are mainly crepuscular; this means that they are most active at dawn and at dusk when light levels are low and their prey animals are less likely to spot them. The temperatures are also cooler later in the day.

Copycats: tigers have been known to imitate the sound of other animals, including certain prey species like Sambar deer. By mimicking Sambar deer sounds they are able to lure an unsuspecting deer close enough to ambush it. Amur tigers will also eat bears and will make the sound of a bear's prey to lure the bear to them.

Food: tigers can eat 34kg of meat in one meal, that is the equivalent of about 450 sausages! If necessary, they can survive for two weeks without food.

Swimmers: tigers love water and are good swimmers. They bathe in streams and pools to cool off when it is hot and can swim across rivers to find food and patrol their territory. Tigers who live in mangrove areas, for example the Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh, can swim easily between the trees.

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LIFECYCLE:



FOR YOUNG READERS:

A mother tiger has between 1-3 cubs in a litter, she looks after them until they are about 18 months old when they leave to find their own territory.

Cubs: female tigers can have cubs at 3-5 years old. They give birth to between 1-3 cubs in a sheltered den and raise them alone. The cubs don't open their eyes for the first 1-2 weeks. At eight weeks old the cubs will start to leave the den for a short period of time, they don't go on walks with their mother until they are between 3-6 months old. They spend a lot of time play fighting with each other, practising the skills that they will need to survive as adults. At 8-10 months old they will begin to hunt.

Growing up: at around 18 months they will leave their mother to find their own territory.*

Survival: around half of all tiger cubs do not survive past the age of two years.

ADAPTATIONS:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Tigers have great eyesight which helps them to see the animals that they want to catch and eat when the light is low.

Their stripes help to break up the outline of their bodies so that they blend in with the tall grass and are able to get close to the animals that they want to eat without being spotted. They have long canine teeth and long, sharp claws which help them to hunt. They also have very good hearing.

Tigers have partly webbed toes which helps them to swim.

Senses: in the dark a tiger's eyesight is six times stronger than humans. They also have excellent hearing, which is important when hunting. Tigers can rotate their ears, helping them pick up the sounds of the forest more readily.

Camouflage: every tiger has around 100 stripes, the stripes help to break up the outline of the tiger's body and allow it to blend in with the background, enabling it to get close to prey without being spotted! Every tiger has a different pattern of stripes, this helps scientists to identify the different tigers that they are studying. It's not just tiger's fur that is stripy, their skin is stripy too. Most of the tiger's prey animals, like deer, do not see in colour so even if the tiger was walking in bright green grass, the deer would not be able to see a difference between the green grass and the tiger's orange coat.

Legs: a tiger's hind legs are longer than their front legs allowing them to pounce just short of nine metres. This is a very useful skill when hunting.

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Tigers have antiseptic saliva, they tend to lick an injury in order to prevent any infection.

ADAPTATIONS:

Tongue: a tiger's tongue is covered in small, sharp projections, called papillae, when they lick the bones of their prey the papillae help them to get all the meat off, a bit like sandpaper!

Fur: the thickness of a tiger's fur depends on where it lives, Amur tigers living in colder areas have thicker fur.

Webbed toes: tigers' toes are partially webbed which helps them to be excellent swimmers.

Teeth: tigers have the longest upper canine teeth of all the big cats at around 7.6cm long. There is a pressure sensing nerve inside these teeth, allowing them to accurately deliver a fatal bite to their prey.

Padded paws: large, padded paws help them to walk silently through the forest, helping them to get close to prey without being heard.

Claws: their sharp, curved claws are up to 10cm long and are kept retracted inside their paws unless they need them to grasp prey or climb up/mark trees.

Ocelli: tigers have white circle markings on the backs of their ears known as ocelli. These ocelli are thought to serve as 'fake eyes' so that predators approaching from behind think that they have already been seen. It has also been suggested that cubs might use them to follow their mothers through long grass.

Whiskers: They use their whiskers to help them feel their way in the dark, to detect where to bite their prey, to sense wind direction to make sure their scent will not blow towards the animal that they are hunting. Tigers have five different types of whiskers.

Ears: a tiger's ears can rotate, making their ears more sensitive to sound, they have excellent hearing and can pick up on even small sounds made by their prey.



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WHY TIGERS ARE IMPORTANT:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Tigers are very special animals; they are the largest of the big cat family and the only one with stripes. Tigers help to keep the forests healthy by eating some of the deer that would otherwise eat the young trees as they grow.

It would be devastating to lose tigers to extinction as they are not only beautiful but are vital to the *ecosystems** where they live. As top *apex predator**, tigers keep the number of herbivores, like deer, down. If there were no tigers there would be no forests. The reason for this is that if there were too many herbivores, they would eat all the young trees so no little trees would survive to become big trees.

WHY DO TIGERS NEED OUR HELP?



FOR YOUNG READERS: People are cutting down the forests where the tigers like to live so there are fewer places for tigers to live. Some people also use tiger fur as decoration or their bones as medicine.

Poaching: tiger parts are bought and sold as traditional medicine and their fur is used for decoration.

Habitat Loss: as human populations expand, the amount of space available for tigers to live and hunt is shrinking, this is having a huge impact on tigers. It has been estimated that in less than 100 years tigers have lost 93% of their habitat as areas have been *deforested** for timber. This also means that there is less space for their prey species, so there is less food for the tigers.

Climate Change: in some areas sea level rises caused by climate change, is threatening to flood tiger habitat, endangering the tigers, and further reducing the amount of habitat available to them.

Human-Wildlife conflict: tigers are having to live closer to people as their habitat shrinks, this means that sometimes people shoot them because they are worried that they may attack their livestock, like cows, goats and sheep.



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HOW DOES DSWF HELP?

DSWF is supporting ground-based tiger conservation projects in India, Thailand, and Russia, by providing funding for undercover investigations into the illegal wildlife trade and helping with community engagement and education programmes.

DSWF also calling for a total ban on the trade of tiger parts.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

ADOPT - by adopting a tiger you will directly fund DSWF's ground-based work protecting tigers in the wild.

USE YOUR VOICE - to let others know about the problems tigers are facing and how you can help protect them.

BE MORE GREEN - there are lots of things that we can all do to help the planet and it's incredible wildlife, [click this link](#) to find out what you can do!

*GLOSSARY:

- *Ambush*: to attack by surprise using camouflage.
- *Apex*: a predator at the top of a food chain.
- *Deforested*: past tense, clear an area of forests or trees.
- *Ecosystem*: living things interacting with one another and their environment.
- *Endangered*: under threat of extinction.
- *Panthera*: the genus of the cat family which contains the big cats: lions, leopards, tigers, snow leopards and jaguars.

World
Tiger Day is
celebrated
annually on
29 July.

