

The last year of the TIGER

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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

THE (LAST) YEAR OF THE TIGER?

By Sally Hamilton

On February 14th the Chinese will be celebrating their New Year's Eve and in the Chinese Zodiac 2010 falls in the Year of the Tiger. Many wildlife species are endangered, but it is now thought that the Wild Tiger is one of the most critically endangered of all. In the 20th century three of the eight sub-species of tiger became extinct; the Balinese in 1937, the Caspian in the 1950's and most recently the Javan in the 1980's.

The five remaining sub-species are all critically endangered – these are the Siberian, largest of the tigers, the Bengal, the Sumatran, the Indo-Chinese and the South China tiger. The South China tiger is the smallest of the sub-species and is also the closest to extinction, it is believed there are now only 25 left in the wild.

Although tiger derivatives are totally illegal and it has never been proven medically, tiger parts raise significant amounts of money because many Chinese believe they can cure certain ailments. Because of this and their increasing awareness of the need to conserve their wildlife, China has recently made changes to their animal welfare legislation and tightened their laws on the illegal hunting, trapping and farming of wild tigers.

The critical decline of the wild tiger is not just happening in China. It is an Indo-Russian-Asian issue as well. A villager in India can earn double their yearly wage by killing a tiger. It is not surprising that these animals are so readily poached and exploited when an undamaged tiger skin can fetch between £6000 and £8000.

Due to loss of habitat, intense exploitation, lack of conservation and political will, an international population of 100,000 in 1900 is now thought to have dwindled to around just 3,500 left in the wild, leaving a dangerously low gene pool with which to try and increase tiger numbers. We are losing a tiger a day in the wild. Latest figures suggest that India has around 1,200, Russia approximately 350, Sumatra about 350 and the Indo –tiger around 1,200. That is it!

De-forestation, trophy hunting, poaching (and human poverty) have ground away at the tiger's place in the world so that, today, very little of it remains. The imminent and total extinction from the wild of this most noble of creatures is perilously close.

In the Forests of the Night

Tiger and man do not live comfortably together because both man and tiger are at the top of their particular food chain and man is the tiger's only predator. The tiger shies naturally away from humans and is a solitary creature. It is also highly territorial and can be very ferocious. Sadly it is the

tiger's fearsome reputation that goes before it and it is true to say that on occasions, a tiger will attack humans, but this is normally due to lack of prey and clashes of living area. Tigers are renowned for their power and strength and ability to floor their prey with one leap and a bite to the neck. Because a tiger will always attack from behind, local people have been known to wear masks on the back of their heads when out in the forest in the Sundarbans.

Because tigers are typically shy and solitary, scientists and conservationists can really only speculate on the actual numbers still left in the wild, but they all agree that – without concerted and immediate effort - we are likely to see the total extinction of the wild tiger within 10 years. The Chinese zodiac runs in twelve year cycles, meaning that 2010 could well turn out to be the very last year of the Tiger where these magnificent animals still existed in the wild.

Helping the Wild Tiger

There are several tiger conservation and protection programs already in place working to save this species from extinction.

Individuals can help by raising awareness of the critical situation that tigers are facing and by supporting tiger conservation organizations such as those listed below. Another option is to adopt a tiger or make a donation of what you can afford to the tiger project of your choice. You can also contribute by organising your own fund raisers and by educating others and encouraging them to help this cause as well. My wish for 2010 – the year of the Tiger – is that this most regal of big cats (the largest cat of all) remains with us for a long, long time, I, for one, sincerely hope it is not too late to save them.

The International Tiger Coalition – <http://tigercoalition.com>

An alliance of more than 35 organisations united under the common aim of stopping the trade in tiger parts and products, from any source.

Tiger Awareness – www.tigerawareness.co.uk

A registered charity working directly with local organizations in India, at ground level, where the funds are most needed and given directly by them.

41 William Illiffe Road
Hinckley
Leicestershire
LE10 0LX - +44(0)1455 447 315

Tiger Watch - <http://www.tigerwatch.net>

Based in India, Tiger Watch is doing an excellent job in rehabilitating tribal hunting families in Ranthambhore, India. They are successfully reducing poaching in the area with their work.

Global Tiger Patrol - www.globaltigerpatrol.org

A conservation agency prioritising protection of the tiger in the wild.

The Old School House,

Petworth Road
Haslemere
Surrey
GU27 3B - +44 (0)1428 653703

Tiger photograph courtesy of Phil Davis, Tiger Awareness.

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