



TIGER CONSERVATION



THE ISSUE

Tigers are the largest species of cat and one of the most iconic animals on the planet. There may have been over 100,000 tigers roaming this planet about a century ago. Wild tigers have disappeared in over 93% of their historical range since the beginning of the 20th century, and as few as 3,200 of them were left. An ambitious and visionary species conservation goal was set by the governments of the 13 tiger range countries: to double the number of wild tigers by 2022 – the next Chinese year of the tiger. This is the Tx2 goal.

As of April 2016, wild tiger numbers increased for the first time globally, with the new estimation at 3,890 wild tigers. This recent revision from the 2010 estimate came primarily from new surveys in India, Russia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The number was higher due to a growth in the population from conservation efforts, as well as new areas being included in the national surveys, and improved survey techniques.

Tigers are crucial for the ecosystems in which they live. As top predators of the food chain, tigers keep populations of prey species in check, which in turn maintains the balance between herbivores and the vegetation upon which they feed.

Tigers are an umbrella species – meaning their conservation also conserves many other species in the same area. They are long-ranging and require vast amounts of habitat to survive; an adult male's home range varies from 150-1000 km². Large areas of intact forest therefore must be preserved for tiger conservation. Due to high demand from the illegal wildlife trade, tigers require robust enforcement against poaching and habitat encroachment, as well as systematic biological monitoring.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

WWF-Hong Kong works with Traffic International and WWF offices across the region to put an end to the illegal trade of globally important species, including tigers. We support WWF's Tx2 Tigers Alive initiative, and we are currently supporting tiger conservation work in Bhutan, Thailand and Cambodia, contributing to the 2022 Tx2 target.

In Bhutan, our work covers site assessment of three tiger parks by independent reviewers, seed funding for the CA|TS country plan 2018-2022, training rangers to CA|TS standards, and training field staff to set up and manage camera traps.

In Thailand, our work focuses on communications and awareness-raising programs to build public support for tiger recovery, including outreach campaigns in villages and schools near Khao Yai, training volunteers to become community leaders for tiger conservation, national public education programs, and collaboration with other NGOs. We also support ranger training and camera traps survey in Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary, which is located in the Western Forest Complex, one of the most important landscapes for tiger conservation in Thailand and indeed Southeast Asia.

In Cambodia, we support the kingdom's efforts to reintroduce tigers by providing support for existing forest rangers, hiring 15 additional rangers for law enforcement, training and equipping forest rangers, and support for community initiatives and education programs.

In Indonesia, we support forest recovery in Koto Panjang, which serves as a corridor connecting the Sumatran forests of Rimbang Baling, Bukit Bungbuk and Rimbo Panti Pasaman. Sumatra, with its vast, tall and rich rainforests, plays an important role for global climate stability. The island is the only place on the planet where tigers, elephants, rhinos, tapir, and orangutan share space in the wild. Tiger populations in the area can still be increased, contributing to the global tiger recovery.

Rather than focusing on "saving" tigers at a site or country level, Tx2 uses a strategic, long-term approach – working across entire landscapes and encouraging trans-boundary collaboration. This involves increasing protection where the tigers are currently, maintaining wildlife corridors and

connectivity between areas and then boosting resources and protection for where tigers can be in the future, when their numbers have increased.

Doubling wild tigers is possible with full commitment from the tiger range countries. Tigers are cats and therefore breed easily. Given adequate space, prey base and protection, the wild tiger population can increase. Habitats for the increased tiger population have been identified, including 20 recovery sites where tiger populations have the potential to recover rapidly if the required conservation investment is received. These sites are key areas of hope for Tx2. Reintroduction may also be possible in some countries.

However, global poaching levels have reached critical levels. Organized criminal gangs are increasingly involved in the illegal wildlife trade driven by demand for tiger parts. Tiger governments must combat poaching if tigers are to have a future. WWF remains a major driving force behind Tx2. We are currently:

- Driving political momentum to ensure tigers remain a top priority for world leaders;
- Training rangers, and developing conservation standards (CA|TS) and technology (SMART) to achieve the goal of zero poaching;
- Tackling the illegal wildlife trade through our partnership with TRAFFIC;
- Focusing efforts in key tiger landscapes;
- Ensuring there is space for both tigers and people in the future.

OUR ASK

With Hong Kong vigorously pursuing a free trade policy and firmly believing in a multilateral trading system, the OSCO upgrading will ensure that Hong Kong fulfills its commitments to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on illegal wildlife trade (IWT). Strengthening actions on IWT is also in line with Hong Kong's commitments outlined in APEC agreements: 26th APEC Ministerial Meeting, and the APEC 2015 Leaders' Declaration to take actions to combat wildlife trafficking and related corruption. WWF urges government to:

- Include wildlife crime offences under Schedule 1 of the OSCO to further deter transnational criminal enterprises that use Hong Kong as a route for wildlife smuggling so that our enforcement agency can tackle criminal enterprises with a holistic view as a whole, from source to buyer and smuggler to kingpin, instead of focusing solely on smugglers, who have less influence in the criminal enterprises;
- Further strengthen communications with source countries of wildlife products through Hong Kong Police Force's Crime and Security Department and its Liaison Bureau to develop criminal intelligence on wildlife transnational crime syndicates;
- Further strengthen the government's Wildlife Crime Task Force and work more closely with China's National Inter-agency CITES Enforcement Coordination Group, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime and other regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks. This will help intelligence analysis and resources tasking, which are needed to identify and tackle illegally sourced, exported, or re-exported wildlife products.

We are at an exciting moment in time where we have managed to halt the rapid decline of tigers. Now we need a monumental push forward to ensure they increase, and continue to increase, up and beyond 2022. We need commitment and dedication from all tiger range governments. We need passion, enthusiasm and unwavering support from the public.

July 2020