



Threats to Tigers

Tigers are in trouble. Their current population is approximately 3,200 individuals, and can be found in only 7% of their historic range.¹ A combination of complex, interrelated issues are contributing to the tiger's decline. Fortunately, the conservation community is well aware of these issues and is working to reverse the tiger's population decline. It will come down to political and societal will to successfully save this iconic species.

Five main factors are driving the tiger toward extinction: habitat loss, poaching, human-tiger conflicts, loss of prey species, and disease.

Habitat Loss

Tiger habitat has decreased by 93% in the past 100 years.¹ Tigers are losing critical habitat due to human encroachment, cattle grazing, infrastructure development, agriculture production, and logging. The human population is continuing to rise, especially in Asia. As a result, more habitat is cleared to build homes, develop roads, and plant crops (i.e. palm oil) to sustain the growing human population.



Poaching

Along with habitat loss, poaching is one of the greatest threats facing tigers. All subspecies of tigers are victims of poaching to satisfy demand for their parts and derivatives. The demand for tiger parts stems primarily from China, where tiger skins are used as decorations and tiger bones are used to produce tiger bone wine. In the past, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) was a main driver of tiger poaching due to demand for tiger parts in traditional remedies. This is no longer the case, as China's ban on the use of tiger parts in 1993 and a voluntary shift in the attitudes of TCM practitioners to stop using endangered species in their remedies has reduced the impact of TCM on tiger populations.² While some people still use tiger parts in medicine, it is wealth, status, and greed that primarily fuel tiger poaching today. See our *Tiger Farming Fact Sheet* to learn more about how the practice of farming tigers is creating an avenue to launder wild tiger parts into the legal market.

Human-tiger Conflicts

As human populations increase, they increasingly infringe upon the remaining natural areas home to the world's tigers. This puts humans and tigers in close quarters, which inevitably leads to interactions that don't always end well for both the humans and the tigers.



When humans take up residence in or around a tiger's territory, the tiger may take valuable livestock or even kill people. This can lead to "revenge killings" in which a person or group of people retaliate and kill the tiger that took their livestock or killed one of their family members. In addition to tiger deaths, these human-tiger conflicts negatively affect locals' attitudes toward tigers, making future conservation programs increasingly difficult.⁴

Loss of Prey Species

With no food to eat, tigers cannot last long even in an intact forest. Poaching of prey species, while not killing tigers directly, can have severe effects on tiger populations. As people poach tiger prey species, such as deer and boar, tigers become more desperate to find food and venture out of their normal territories. This leads to an increased risk of human-tiger conflicts and tiger population declines.



Disease

A growing concern for the world's tiger populations is the spread of disease, specifically canine distemper virus. Counter intuitive to what its name suggests canine distemper affects a wide range of species. The virus is deadly, and often has neurological effects on tigers. They become weak and unable to hunt, which often results with tigers wandering into human settlements desperately attempting to find an easy meal. Studies have suggested that the virus can be transmitted to tigers through infected domestic dogs³ that place tiger populations near towns or villages at a greater risk of contracting this disease.

- 1) Sanderson, E., Forrest, J., Loucks, C., Ginsberg, J., Dinerstein, E., Seidensticker, J., ... & Wikramanayake, E. (2006). Setting priorities for the conservation and recovery of wild tigers: 2005–2015. The Technical Assessment. WCS, WWF, Smithsonian, and NFWF-STF, New York-Washington, DC.
- 2) Environmental Investigation Agency. "Hidden in Plain Site: China's Clandestine Tiger Trade (2013). Report.
- 3) <http://eco.confex.com/eco/2015/webprogram/Paper55676.html>
- 4) Goodrich, J. M. (2010). Human-tiger conflict: a review and call for comprehensive plans. Integrative Zoology, 5(4), 300-312.