



# TIGER

Phylum: Chordata, Class: Mammalia, Order: Carnivora, Family: Felidae  
*Panthera tigris*

There are 5 subspecies\* of tigers:

Siberian  
Sumatran  
Indochinese  
South China  
Bengal (Indian)

- Recent evidence suggests that the Sumatran tiger is a separate species, rather than a separate tiger *subspecies*. (“Saving a ‘New’ Tiger”)

**Size:** The Siberian is the largest tiger, the Sumatran, the smallest.

**Weight:** 400-660 lbs. (males), 250-400 lbs. (females)

**Height at shoulder:** 2.5 - 3.5 feet

**Body length:** 5-10 ft. long from nose to tail

**Lifespan:** 15 years in the wild; 20+ years in captivity

**Habitat:** Tigers can live in a variety of habitats. They do need adequate cover to be able to ambush or stalk their prey, and are therefore usually found in forested areas.

**Range/distribution:**

- **Bengal** - India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar
- **Siberian tigers** - the Amur region of the Russian far east
- **Sumatran tiger** - island of Sumatra in Indonesia
- **South China** - 3 areas near the coast of the East China Sea
- **Indochinese** - South China, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia

**Status:** All 5 types of tigers are *endangered*.

According to some estimates, fewer than 5,000 tigers may be left in the wild. Other biologists feel that the number may be lower - around 3,000 animals surviving in the wild. Three sub-species of tigers are extinct: the Caspian, Balinese, and Javan.

Tigers are protected by CITES (Appendix I), an international agreement that restricts trade in wild animals and their parts.

**Threats to survival:**

Tigers are threatened by **habitat loss** and **poaching**. Tigers require large prey and adequate cover in which to ambush their prey. Many wild tiger populations are small and isolated, their habitats fragmented by human encroachment. Scientists fear that many of these populations are becoming inbred and losing genetic diversity.

Tigers are also threatened by poaching, in spite of laws designed to protect them. They may be hunted for their hides or for use of their body parts in folk medicines. They have also been persecuted because people fear that they are “man-eaters” or prey on livestock. Tigers may occasionally kill livestock, as humans encroach on the tigers’ natural habitats and natural prey sources become scarce. Sadly, three subspecies of tigers have already become extinct within the last 100 years - the Balinese, the Caspian, and the Javan tigers.

**Diet in the wild:** Tigers are carnivores. They prey mainly on large animals such as antelope, deer, wild cattle, and wild boars. A female with dependent cubs may hunt every 5-6 days. A lone, adult tiger may hunt every 8 days. Catching prey is not always easy for tigers. As few as one in 10-20 attempts to catch prey may be successful.



### Special features:

- One of the tiger subspecies, the Siberian tiger, is the largest of all cats.
- Tigers like water and **can swim** easily across rivers.
- Tigers are **specially adapted to kill medium to large-sized prey**. They have hindlimbs that are longer than their forelimbs, an adaptation for jumping. Their large, muscular forelimbs can grab and hold prey. Tigers also have sharp, retractile claws and large canine teeth.
- Tiger paw prints are often called “**pugmarks**”.

### Behavior:

- Tigers are usually **solitary**, except for mothers and cubs.
- Tigers live in large territories and may travel as far as 20 miles a day. The territory of one male may overlap that of several females.
- Tigers are very **territorial**. They mark their territories by spraying urine mixed with anal gland secretions. Feces may also be dropped to mark territorial boundaries. Other “signposts” are marked with scratch marks.
- Male territories are usually larger (14 - 65 square miles) than female territories and are based on the ability to find breeding females to produce offspring.
- Female territories are smaller (7- 21 square miles) and center around the availability of adequate prey for mother and cubs. While the cubs are young and unable to follow the female on hunts, she must obtain food from a small area so that she can easily return at frequent intervals to nurse the young.
- In areas of prime habitat, the number of young born exceeds the space available for large territories for each animal. Therefore, some animals are forced to live on the periphery of other territories. These animals are important to promote “genetic mixing” in the breeding population. Unfortunately, animals that live on the periphery often come in conflict with humans as man and his livestock continue to heavily exploit the tiger’s native habitat.

### Breeding & Caring for Young:

- Sexual maturity is reached at 3-4 years of age.
- **Females in estrus** alert males to their presence by spraying urine on trees and “other natural signposts”. Tigers will vocalize loudly to locate each other.
- **Gestation** = 103 days. Females usually give birth to **two to three cubs**. Each cub weighs about 2 pounds.
- The **cubs** are born blind and helpless. At about 8 weeks of age they are old enough to begin following their mother on her hunts. They are weaned at 3-6 months of age. They continue to depend on their mother for food until they are about 18 months old.
- Cubs usually stay with their mothers for two years before dispersing to establish their own territories.
- There have been reports of male tigers killing cubs (although there is not as much evidence as for lions). These kills are believed to be associated with the take-over of another male’s home range.

### Efforts to save tigers:

The AZA Tiger Species Survival Plan includes breeding plans for 2 of the 5 tiger subspecies, the Sumatran and the Siberian. A program is currently being developed for the Indochinese tiger. The American Zoo and Aquarium Association’s Species Survival Plans (SSPs) are special programs designed by a team of zoo and wildlife professionals. The plans outline breeding plans, work to increase public awareness and education, help conduct research, and in some cases, organize programs to reintroduce captive-bred wildlife into secure habitats.

