

Conservation of Tigers Worldwide



LSU's official mascot.

Mike, LSU's beloved mascot, is not only a symbol of the university's school spirit and pride, but also a key in the education of the public about the preservation of tigers and the conservation of their habitat worldwide. 100,000 visitors come to see Mike each year. Mike the Tiger's new home is also a prime example of the research that is being conducted on keeping tigers in better habitats in captivity.



An aerial photo showing former forestland in Borneo, now converted to large palm-oil plantations. Photo courtesy of Sally Kneidel of Veggie Revolution.

Until 1900, there were about 100,000 tigers living in the wild in Asia. There were nine subspecies that roamed from Turkey to the Caspian Sea and from southeastern Russia to the islands of Indonesia. Today, three of the subspecies are extinct and 90% of the world's wild tiger population is gone, leaving only approximately 3,200 wild tigers alive, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

The main reasons for the dramatic loss of tigers are hunting, loss of habitat, lack of food sources, and fragmentation of population groups. In the past, tigers were poached for their skins, but recently there has been a growing illegal market in tiger bones and other parts used in medicines in Asia.



A tiger law enforcement expert and a high ranking Thai police official discuss tiger trafficking issues in front of poached tiger skins at a meeting in Thailand. Photo courtesy of Wild Aid Thailand.

Tigers have lost much of their natural habitat to agriculture and the timber industry, which has also led to a decline in numbers of their natural prey. The animals that tigers once lived on are now also hunted for human consumption. Due to this lack of prey, tigers have killed livestock and sometimes humans, resulting in revenge tiger killings and a general fear of tigers by local villagers.



A female tiger moves her cub. This photo was taken with a camera trap used to record tiger activity for conservation efforts in Huai Kha Khaeng in Thailand. Photo courtesy of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

As tiger habitats become smaller, distances between tiger population groups become larger, reducing the number of breeding partners and weakening the gene pool. By the 1970s, tigers clearly were on the brink of extinction, but new conservation laws helped preserve and protect these magnificent animals.



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