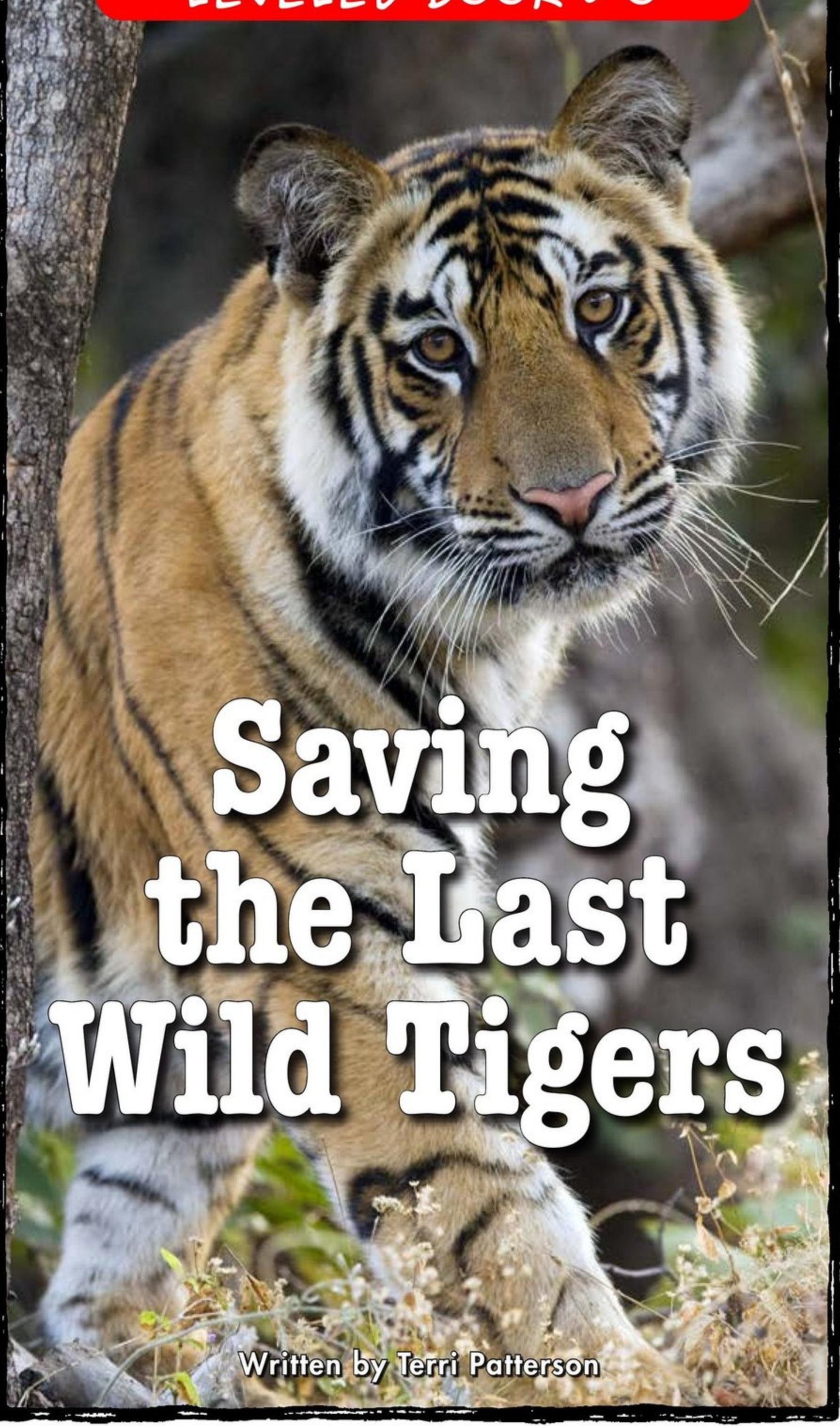


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Saving the Last Wild Tigers

Written by Terri Patterson

Saving the Last Wild Tigers



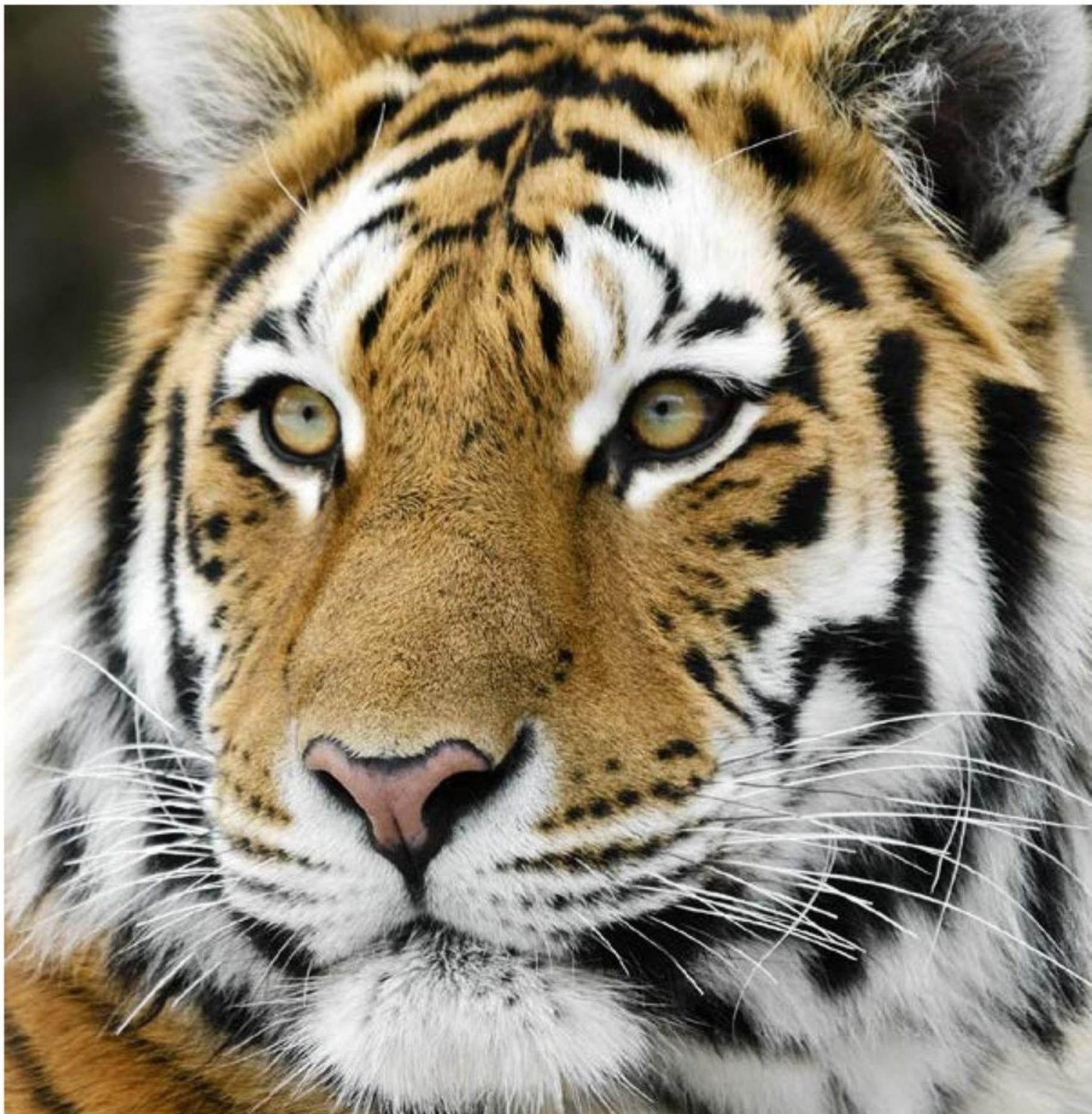
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Tigers are the largest of all big cats.

Introduction

Tigers are some of the most powerful animals in the world. That's why you might be surprised to learn that these huge cats are in big trouble. They are in danger of dying out completely. But many people around the world are trying to save them.

Why Tigers Are Important

Tigers are among Earth's most beautiful animals. They are also important members of the **habitats** where they live. They help keep nature in balance. Tigers eat **hoofed** animals such as deer and wild pigs. Without tigers, these animals would eat too many plants. Then other animals that need the plants for food and shelter would suffer.

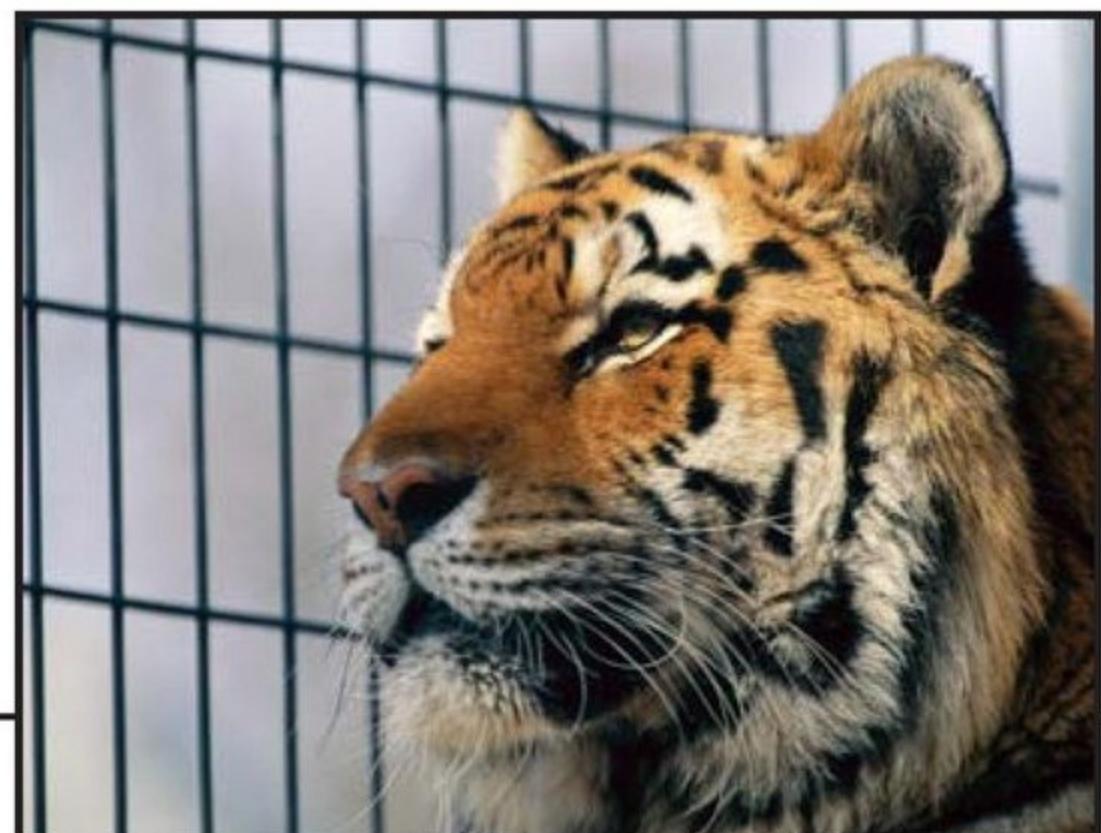


A Bengal tiger chases two sambar deer in India.

Disappearing Tigers

Long ago, nine types of tigers lived across large parts of Asia. During the 1900s, three types became **extinct**. Now a fourth type of tiger is probably extinct in the wild.

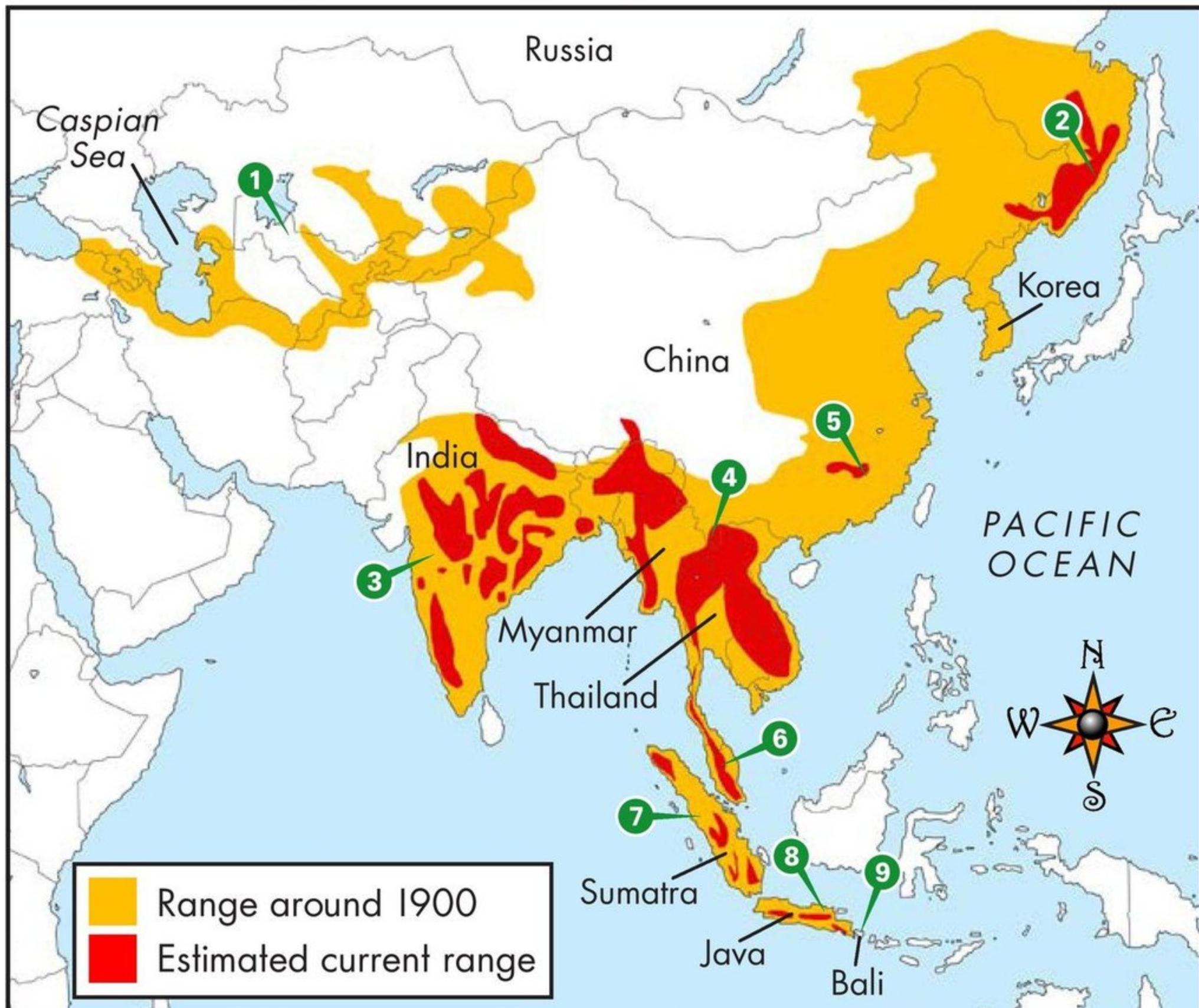
One hundred years ago, more than 100,000 wild tigers were alive. Now, only about 3,500 live in the wild. All remaining types of tigers are **endangered**.



Word Wise

If a type of animal is *extinct*, all of its kind have died out. If a type of animal is *extinct in the wild*, no wild members of its kind are still alive. Animals that are *extinct in the wild* only live in *captivity*—in zoos or other places where they are not free. Today, many more tigers live in captivity than in the wild.

Tigers Long Ago and Today



- ① Caspian tiger (extinct)
- ② Amur (Siberian) tiger
- ③ Bengal tiger
- ④ Indochinese tiger
- ⑤ South China tiger (probably extinct in the wild)
- ⑥ Malayan tiger
- ⑦ Sumatran tiger
- ⑧ Javan tiger (extinct)
- ⑨ Bali tiger (extinct)

Tigers live in tiny parts of the areas where they used to live.

Buying, Selling, and Poaching

The biggest reason that tigers are endangered is the buying and selling of tiger body parts for money. To get these body parts, some people **poach**, or break the law and kill wild tigers.

Why do people want tiger body parts? For many centuries, some Chinese medicines used tiger bones and other body parts. Some people thought that these medicines would help cure certain illnesses. They believed that a tiger's strength could heal people.



This Chinese medicine contains powdered tiger bone.



This shop in China uses tiger bones and sells tiger products.

Most Chinese medicines do not use tiger parts. But some companies still make medicines from tiger parts. Criminals can make a lot of money by selling dead tigers to these companies.

Selling tiger products has been against the law in China since 1993. And most countries around the world have agreed not to buy or sell tiger parts or products. But poaching continues. Poachers care more about making money than about protecting endangered animals.



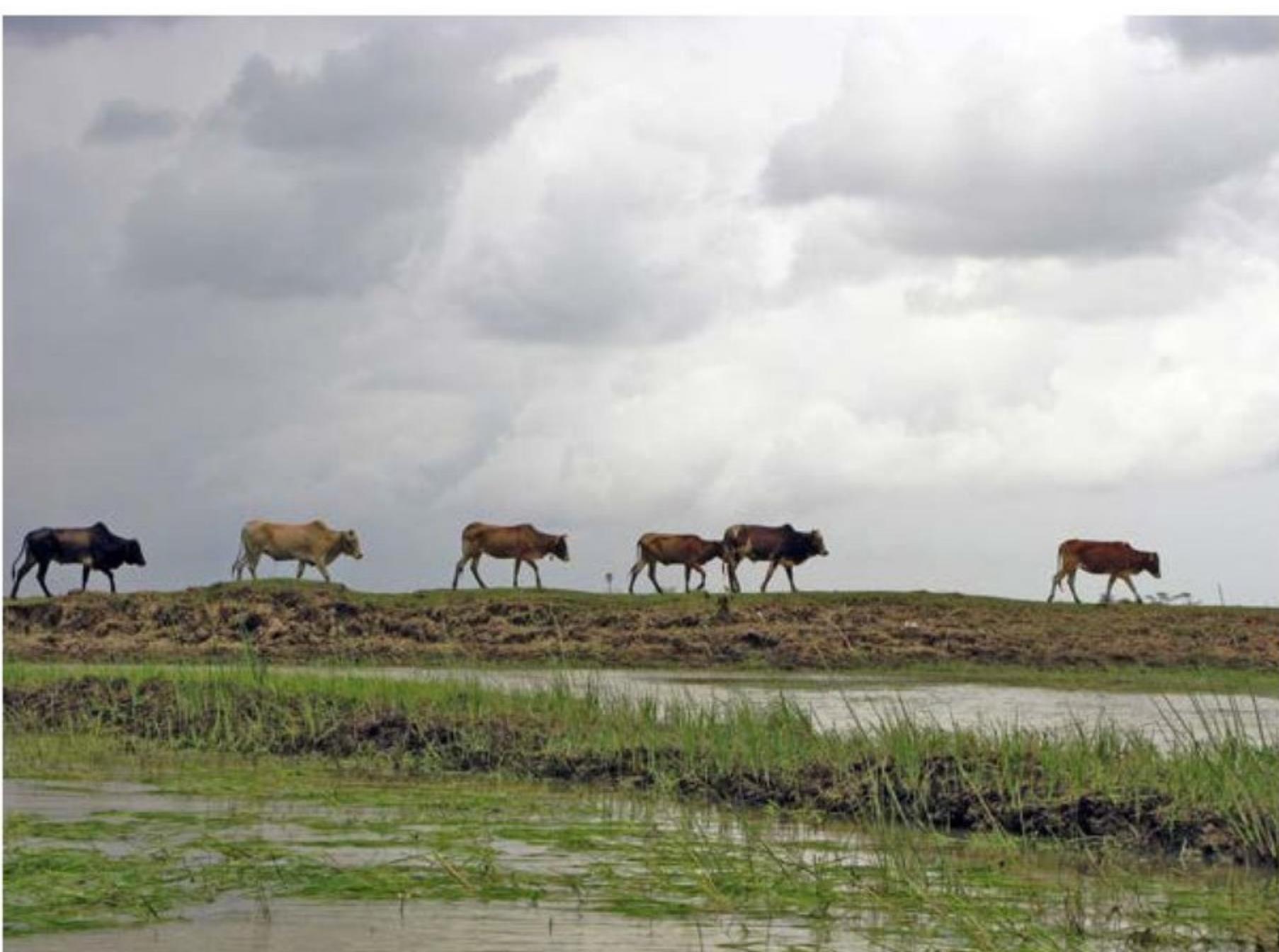
Tigers can only live in habitats that have hoofed animals, water, and dense plants.

Habitat Loss

Another reason that tigers are endangered is because their habitat is disappearing. The number of people in Asia is growing quickly. People need more land to live on and to grow food. Houses, farms, and roads are replacing the wild lands where tigers once made their homes. As the wild lands disappear, tigers must live in small areas that are far apart from each other. When this happens, it is much harder for tigers to survive.

When tiger habitats are destroyed, the animals that tigers eat have less land to live on, too. And people hunt those animals, so their numbers drop even more.

Tigers have less wild food, so they look for food closer to where people live. They sometimes attack people, but more often they attack farm animals such as cattle and sheep. Farmers shoot tigers that they see attacking their animals.



Cows walk in an area where tigers hunt. Some farmers poison tigers that eat their animals.



The tigers in India are Bengal tigers.

Saving Tigers

People around the world are working hard to save tigers from becoming extinct. The fourteen countries where tigers live have many **conservation** programs to protect tigers.

India's government began a program called Project Tiger in 1973. Project Tiger started creating tiger **reserves**—large, protected areas of tiger habitat. There are now about forty tiger reserves. Guards work at the reserves to prevent poaching.

Teams of guards also work in Russia and in other places to protect tigers from poaching. Guards work along the borders of many Asian countries. They help stop tiger parts and products from illegally entering or leaving their countries.

Governments protect tigers by passing laws to stop illegal tiger business. They also help by punishing poachers. In Russia, poachers used to pay a fine equal to only \$50 for killing a tiger. Now they pay \$20,000.



Poachers kill tigers to sell their skins as well as their bones and other body parts.

Conservation groups from many nations help in countries where tigers live. They ask governments to create more reserves where tigers will be safe. They also raise money for tiger projects, such as helping orphaned tiger cubs.

Conservation groups also teach people around the world about the need to protect tigers. And they help scientists and governments think about ways to work together to save tigers.



Some tiger cubs are able to return to the wild.



Conclusion

No one wants tigers to become extinct. But many people do not understand that time is running out for tigers.

Several things must happen to save tigers. More land in tiger countries must be protected so it can stay natural and wild. More guards must be paid to stop poachers. Plant medicines must replace tiger medicines so there is less reason for poaching. And anyone who buys or sells tiger parts and products must be stopped. If people work together, these beautiful animals may be saved.

Glossary

conservation (<i>n.</i>)	the protection of wild lands and the living things found there (p. 12)
endangered (<i>adj.</i>)	in danger of dying out completely (p. 6)
extinct (<i>adj.</i>)	completely wiped out (p. 6)
habitats (<i>n.</i>)	the natural environments of plants or animals (p. 5)
hoofed (<i>adj.</i>)	having hooves, or feet covered with a hard growth made of horn (p. 5)
poach (<i>v.</i>)	to kill a wild animal illegally (p. 8)
reserves (<i>n.</i>)	places where wild plants and animals are protected (p. 12)
survive (<i>v.</i>)	to stay alive (p. 10)

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