



tiger

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However, because hunting them is also a sign of bravery in some cultures, tigers are endangered. Tigers are hunted for their meat, pelt and body parts that are used in folk remedies. To make matters worse, these great cats have lost most of their habitat due to logging, road building and development, according to All About Wildlife. Experts estimate there are no more than 3,200 tigers left in the wild.

Do all tigers have stripes?

Most tigers have the characteristic orange fur with black or brown stripes, but these markings vary between subspecies. For example, the very large Siberian tiger has pale orange fur with few stripes, while the smaller Sumatran tigers in the Sunda Islands have dark, thickly striped fur.

No two tigers have the same markings, and their stripes are as individual as fingerprints are for humans. In the wild, a tiger's stripes are important for survival, as they act as camouflage, appearing as moving shadows in long grass and in trees, according to National Geographic.

The white Bengal tigers seen in some zoos are the result of a recessive gene, and are not albinos. In fact, it's unlikely that true albino tigers (with pink eyes) exist. Some historical reports detail tigers with black fur and tan stripes, caused by excessive pigmentation, but these accounts are extremely rare.

On the backs of each ear, tigers have a white spot of fur, called ocelli, according to Tigers.org. It's likely the spots act as fake eyes and they may also help tigers communicate with one another.

A tiger's hind legs are longer than its front legs, allowing it to jump up to 32.5 feet (10 meters), according to Sea World. Tiger claws are up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) long, and are used to grab and hold onto their prey.

The largest tiger subspecies, the Siberian, also called Amur, are 10.75 feet (3.3 m) long and weigh up to 660 pounds (300 kilograms), according to National Geographic. The smallest tiger is the Sumatran, which weighs 165 - 308 pounds (74 - 139 kg), according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Tigers also have very long tails, which can add around 3 feet (one m) to their overall length, according to Sea World.

Where tigers live and what they eat

Wild tigers live in Asia. Larger subspecies, such as the Siberian tiger, tend to live in northern, colder areas, such as eastern Russia and northeastern China. Smaller subspecies live in southern, warmer countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Depending on the subspecies, tigers live in a variety of environments, including arid forests, flooded mangrove forests, tropical forests and taiga (a cold forest with coniferous trees), according to the San Diego Zoo.

All tigers are carnivores. Most of a tiger's diet consists of large prey, such as pigs, deer, rhinos or elephant calves. To kill their prey, tigers clamp down on the animal's neck with their jaws and suffocate the animal. The tiger's canine teeth have pressure-sensing nerves, so it knows exactly where to deliver a fatal bite to its prey, according to the WWF. Though tigers are fierce hunters, they are no strangers to failure, as they are successful in only 10% of their hunts, according to National Geographic.

Tiger babies are born helpless. At birth, a cub weighs 2.2 pounds (1 kg), and a female may have as many as seven cubs at a time, according to the San Diego Zoo. Around half of all cubs don't live beyond the age of two, according to WWF. The mother must leave the cubs while she hunts, leaving them open to other predators. Most tiger mothers are unable to kill enough prey to feed a large litter, so some cubs may die of starvation.

At just 8 weeks old, tiger cubs are ready to learn how to hunt and go out on hunting expeditions with their mother. At 2 years old, the cubs will set out on their own, and their mother will be ready for another set of cubs. In the wild, tigers typically live 10 to 15 years, according to Smithsonian's National Zoo.

Classification/taxonomy

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