

# Tiger Conservation In India: A Critical Analysis

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“The Indian tiger has been the center of attraction in the Indian jungles as a big name during the last two centuries. Apart from maharajas and nawabs who were interested in hunting tigers, the British officers, soldiers, and civil officers were keen on bagging at least one tiger before they retired. A few of them succeeded in scoring a century of tiger heads. Some even repeated the performance as many as 10 times, thus massacring over a thousand tigers in their lifetimes. It is estimated that 80,000 majestic and powerful Bengal tigers were systematically slaughtered by both the British and the maharajas in just 50 years, from 1875 to 1925. In Assam, famous for its tea, the state paid rewards for dead tigers as recently as 1940. Despite this decimation, the Bengal tiger managed to cling onto the edge of existence, and in 1972 finally gained protection under India’s new Wildlife Protection Act.<sup>1</sup>

Hunting tigers was a freestyle sport. Some of the states had launched tiger eradication campaigns and pushed the tiger to the wall. But nothing had been so serious as the large-scale destruction of the tiger habitat due to urbanization, industrialization, and population pressure, as well as the market in tiger skins for export. The extraordinarily high price of the pelt attracted poachers, and the tiger started losing ground and losing it fast. The cumulative result of all these adverse factors is that the tiger is now in danger of extinction, and the latest census has revealed less than 1,900 of these magnificent animals in the entire country.”<sup>2</sup>

There are very few people who understand the true importance of protecting the tiger. Most people feel it is only a matter of saving an animal that makes a

beautiful sight to see. This reason only makes up a fraction of why we need to save this incredible animal. The tiger is at the top of the food chain in the jungles that it roams.<sup>3</sup>

Tiger sightings have become quite rare these days in India, the reason being the tiger killings because of its multitude of medicinal or magical properties. That is why the tiger trade is very profitable. Genuinely, tiger skin is not fashionable, but the smuggling of tiger fur coats and rugs is not difficult for the impoverished hunters. Tiger in India. Even after the bans made by the government warning not to gather even wood from the former hunting grounds, poaching of tigers continues. Still, efforts are continuously made to preserve these magnificent predators from extinction. Initially, the Project started with 9 tiger reserves, covering an area of 16,339 sq km, with a population of 268 tigers. At present, 27 tiger reserves cover an area of 37761 sq km, with a population of 1498 tigers. This amounts to almost 1.14% of the total geographical area of the country. The selection of reserves was guided by the representation of Eco typical wilderness areas across the biogeographic range of tiger distribution in the country. Project Tiger is undisputedly a custodian of the major gene pool. It is also a repository of some of the most valuable ecosystems and habitats for wildlife.<sup>4</sup>

## II. OBJECT OF TIGER CONSERVATION

One of the most exquisite and beloved creatures in the world, the tiger, is in danger of extinction. Its habitat and numbers have decreased by up to 95% since the turn of the century. Three tiger subspecies—the Bali, Javan, and Caspian—were pushed to extinction in this

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<sup>1</sup> Available at : <https://endangeredtigers.org/tiger-species/bengal-tiger/> (last visited on April 20, 2025)

<sup>2</sup> Task Force, Indian Board for Wild Life, Project Tiger: A Proposal for Preservation of the Tiger in India, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, New Delhi, 1972, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [http://www.wildlywise.com/tiger\\_consv.htm](http://www.wildlywise.com/tiger_consv.htm) (last visited on April 20, 2025)

<sup>4</sup> Available at : <http://endangered-tiger.blogspot.in/2010/02/project-tiger.html> ( last visited on April 23, 2025)

century alone. Unfortunately, there is a chance that the remaining five subspecies will suffer the same fate. Poaching is a major problem for tigers across their habitat. To satisfy the demand for their bones and other components, a third of the Siberian or Amur tigers were slaughtered in 1991.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, at the top of its food chain, the tiger is a magnificent and stunning animal that is vital to the industry. Compared to the estimated 100,000 that existed at the start of the 20th century, wild populations of this famous large cat are now much smaller. throughout 5,574 wild tigers are thought to be wandering throughout 10 Asian countries, according to the Global Tiger Forum's 2023 report on the subject. The locations where they can be discovered are likewise getting smaller every year. Wild populations are driven closer to extinction with each tiger that is illegally purchased from a captive facility, such a tiger farm, or stolen and taken from the wild to sustain the illicit wildlife trade.<sup>6</sup>

### III. TIGER SPECIES

#### ■ The Continental Tigers<sup>7</sup>

The Amur tiger: Endangered. Population 580-600 The habitat of Amur tigers ranges from tundra, to humid forests, to coniferous bush-covered mountains up to 6,600 feet. They occupy the largest tract of contiguous forest remaining on earth. Apart from the rarity of the tigers, this in itself is of conservational significance as the area is the most biological diverse in Russia.<sup>8</sup>

The Bengal tiger: Endangered. (*Panthera tigris tigris*) The most numerous tiger subspecies with its remaining wild populations estimated at around 2633. The Bengal tiger roams a wide range of habitats, including high altitudes, tropical and subtropical rainforests, mangroves, and grasslands. They are primarily found in parts of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Bengal tigers are sometimes called Indian

tigers and account for over half of all tigers remaining in the wild. Poaching for tiger parts is their major threat.

The Indochinese tiger: Endangered. (*Panthera tigris corbetti*) They are located in Thailand, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. The population is less than 210. This subspecies has declined by more than 70% in just over ten years. However, little is known about the population state of the Indochinese tiger because access to their habitat is restricted. Habitats are becoming fragmented due to human activity, including road construction. Additionally, their quick decrease has been exacerbated by decades of poaching.

The Malayan tiger: Critically Endangered. Population 250-340. When the forest was removed for plantations, the Malayan tiger, which was formerly indigenous to Singapore's wooded areas, was hunted and killed for government-paid rewards. The 1930s saw the shooting of Singapore's last wild tiger.

The South China tiger: Critically Endangered, presumed extinct in the wild. 178 individuals survive in captivity.

#### ■ The Sunda Island Tigers<sup>9</sup>

Extinct

The Bali tiger: (*Panthera tigris balica*): is an extinct subspecies of tiger that was only found on the island of Bali in Indonesia. It was one of three subspecies of tigers that were found in Indonesia, along with the critically endangered Sumatran tiger and the extinct Javan tiger. Among the subspecies of tigers, it was the smallest. The last confirmed sighting of Bali tigers in western Bali was in the late 1930s. The establishment of the Bali Barat National Park in 1941 likely resulted in the extinction of the Bali tiger before the end of World War II, or perhaps even as late as the early 1950s. Hunting and the loss of prey base and forest

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://pudang.tripod.com/more.html> (last visited on April 24, 2025)

<sup>6</sup> Available at: [https://tigers.panda.org/news\\_and\\_stories/stories/the\\_illegal\\_trade\\_of\\_tigers/](https://tigers.panda.org/news_and_stories/stories/the_illegal_trade_of_tigers/) (last visited on April 24, 2025)

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://endangeredtigers.org/tiger-conservation/> (last visited on April 23, 2025)

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://www.lairweb.org.nz/tiger/amur.html> (last visited on April 23, 2025)

<sup>9</sup> Available at: [http://www.tigersin crisis.com/the\\_tigers.htm](http://www.tigersin crisis.com/the_tigers.htm) (last visited on April 23,2025)

habitat are among the causes of extinction. The Bali tigers are not in captivity.

Extinct

The Javan tiger (*Panthera tigris sondaica*) is a subspecies of extinct tigers that lived on the Indonesian island of Java until the middle of the 1970s. In 1976, the last confirmed sighting of Javan tigers was in Meru Betiri National Park. By the 1940s, they probably had vanished from most of the rest of the island beyond the park boundaries. By the middle of the 1950s, it is thought that there were just 20 to 25 Javan tigers left on the island. Tiger hunting, the destruction of forest habitat for agricultural purposes, and the decline of the tiger's prey base are the main reasons behind the extinction of the Bali tiger. Javan tigers are not kept in captivity.

The Sumatran tiger: It is thought to be between 400 and 500. The true population of Sumatran tigers in the wild could be as low as 400. Additionally, their population is declining. There are around 1,000 Sumatran tigers left in the wild, according to a 1978 tiger census. This indicates a halving of the Sumatran tiger population. In grave peril.

#### IV. WHY TIGERS ARE IMPORTANT<sup>10</sup>

##### ■ Ecological Importance

Tigers are crucial for maintaining a healthy ecosystem. As top predators, they control the number of animals that eat plants, which helps keep the vegetation balanced. This balance supports many other species and keeps the ecosystem strong. By doing so, tigers help preserve forests, support biodiversity, and maintain the natural beauty of their habitats.

##### ■ BIODIVERSITY

Protecting tigers also helps other endangered species like Asian elephants and greater one-horned rhinos that live in the same habitats. By working together to conserve tigers, countries in the region can collaborate on environmental issues, which benefits biodiversity and preserves ecosystems. This approach supports a broader conservation effort, protecting many species and their habitats.

##### ■ Economic Benefits of Tiger Conservation

Tiger habitats not only support biodiversity but also provide significant economic benefits. Well-managed tiger landscapes offer local communities access to natural resources, create jobs, and generate income through ecotourism. Additionally, these ecosystems provide essential services like clean water and air, which benefit the nation as a whole. By conserving tigers, we can support local economies and promote sustainable development.

##### ■ Cultural and Economic Importance

Tigers hold significant cultural and spiritual value in many societies, particularly in Asia. Additionally, tiger conservation can support local economies through sustainable ecotourism, generating income and creating incentives for conservation, thereby benefiting both people and wildlife.

#### V. CAUSES OF TIGER ENDANGERMENT

##### Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

Tigers are losing their natural habitats due to deforestation, urbanization, and infrastructure development, such as roads and dams, which fragment and destroy their habitats, leaving them with limited space, food, and resources, and making survival challenging.

##### Poaching of Tigers

Tigers are hunted for their body parts, such as skin, bones, and claws, which are in demand for traditional medicine and decorative items, driving the poaching trade and significantly contributing to the decline of tiger populations.

##### Human-Tiger Conflict

As tigers lose their habitats, they enter human settlements in search of food or shelter, leading to conflicts with humans, resulting in attacks on humans and livestock, and retaliatory killings, further threatening tiger survival.

##### Prey Base Depletion

The decline of prey species like deer and wild boar due to overhunting and habitat loss severely impacts tiger

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<sup>10</sup> Available at: [https://tigers.panda.org/why\\_tigers/](https://tigers.panda.org/why_tigers/) (last visited on April 24, 2025)

populations, reducing their food sources and making it harder for them to survive, ultimately threatening their very existence.

## VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, tiger protection is essential to sustaining biodiversity, ecological balance, and local economies. Tiger populations are declining as a result of habitat loss, poaching, human-tiger conflict, and the lack of prey, endangering not only the species but also the ecosystems in which they live. Project Tiger and similar initiatives have demonstrated promise in preserving tiger habitats and populations. To guarantee the long-term survival of these magnificent animals, conservation efforts must be maintained and strengthened, laws relating to the conservation must be stricter and punishable severely, local communities must be included, and the underlying reasons for tiger endangerment must be addressed. By coming together, tigers can be saved, and it would maintain our planet's diversity and natural beauty.