

Tiger Extinction a Possibility in India

Illegal pelt trade has seen the big cat's numbers dwindle, new report says.

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Half of the world's surviving tiger population is in danger of extinction because of criminal gangs' illicit skin trade, according to a new report by the Environmental Investigation Agency and the Wildlife Protection Society of India.

The Himalayan plateau is a massive bazaar for Indian tiger skins and it has become fashionable for them to be used in luxury clothes and accessories, according to the report.

Habitat destruction, loss of prey and conflicts with humans has whittled away India's tiger population. The tiger skin trade accelerates these trends, according to conservationists. The result could be tiger extinction in India.

Just before independence in 1947, India's tiger population was 40,000. It has since dropped to about 1,500.

Indian poachers kill more than 200 tigers a year, according to estimates, and as populations fall, the tigers are chased deeper into the reserves. In many sanctuaries, tigers have vanished.

India set up a taskforce last year on the issue, but it just recently established a new agency to prevent tiger extinction.