

Effort Begun to Save Siberian Tigers from Extinction

For the first time, zoologists in China artificially inseminated a rare Siberian tigress.

Posted: January 16, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Chinese zoologists say that for the first time, they've artificially inseminated a Siberian tigress to help save the rare species from extinction.

The China Henghedaozi Feline Breeding Centre, which purports itself to be one of the world's largest breeding bases for Siberian tigers, said that it conducted its first artificial insemination case on Jan. 13, 2007.

Artificial insemination, if proved successful by the test, will help avoid inbreeding and genetic degeneration among Siberian tigers, the center says.

The base's manager, Wang Ligang told the Xinhua news agency that artificial insemination and DNA tests can help protect the rare species. It will no longer be necessary to transport a tiger from far away just to mate another if the artificial insemination test is successful, Wang said.

The sperm for the test were taken from a 7-year-old healthy male tiger that has been trained to live in primitive forests. Artificial insemination will be used in the crossbreeding of tigers and lions in the future if the test is successful, center zoologists said.

Siberian tigers are among the world's 10 most endangered species and mostly live in northeast China and the Far East area of Russia. They're estimated to number about 400 in the wild.

The China Henghedaozi Feline Breeding Centre was established in 1986 with just eight tigers, and now the population is above 700. The center says it will have more than 1,000 tigers by 2010.

The scientists also say they plan to establish a gene bank for the endangered Siberian tigers within three years to ensure heredity diversity for the big cats.