

Wild Cat Profiles - Tiger

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Panthera tigris

Tiger

The tiger is the largest of all cat species and some male Siberian tigers can reach up to 800 pounds. However, the smallest subspecies, the male Sumatran tiger, can weigh as little as 220 pounds. Tigers are the only striped cats. Tigers' stripes serve as their unique "fingerprints" and help scientists to identify specific cats.

The five subspecies of tigers include the Bengal, which lives primarily in India; the Indo-Chinese, which lives in Southeast Asia; the Sumatran, which lives in Malaysia; the Siberian, which lives in Russia, China and North Korea; and the most endangered, the Chinese tiger, of which only 30 to 50 exist in China's wild. Only about 450 Siberian tigers, 500 Sumatran tigers, 1,500 Indo-Chinese tigers and 5,000 Bengal tigers exist in the wild.

Tigers enjoy water, unlike most other big cats, and regularly swim in rivers. They are not the most efficient of hunters, killing their prey in about one out of every 10 attempts.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the tiger represents confidence, dominance, disciplined awareness, kindness and modesty. The biggest threats to tigers in the wild include habitat destruction and hunting, mainly to be used as ingredients in traditional Chinese folk medicine.

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