



Tiger Subspecies

There is only one **species** of tiger: *Panthera tigris*. Animals are usually considered to be different species if they cannot interbreed to produce fertile offspring. The global population of the tiger has been further subdivided taxonomically into nine subspecies.¹

What is a subspecies?

A **subspecies** is a taxonomical term below the level of species. Differing subspecies of an organism are usually comprised of geographically isolated populations. The individuals of a subspecies will share unique genetic and/or physical traits as a result of its isolation from other populations of the species. There are nine tiger subspecies, three of which are extinct. The South China Tiger is believed to be extinct in the wild, and the remaining five subspecies are all either endangered or critically endangered. Five major factors are contributing to the tiger's decline: habitat loss, poaching, loss of prey species, human-tiger conflict, and disease. See our Threats Fact Sheet to learn about the complex issues driving the tiger to extinction. All listed statuses are according to the IUCN Red List.

Bengal Tiger

Panthera tigris tigris

Population: ~2000

Listing: Endangered

Range: India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh

Characteristics: The Bengal tiger has the largest population of the world's remaining subspecies. Once hunted by Indian and British royalty, Bengal tigers have been conserved as a result of effective conservation programs, such as the establishment of protected areas and a thriving ecotourism industry. Despite these successes, the Bengal tiger is still in danger of extinction.

Amur (Siberian) Tiger

Panthera tigris altaica

Population: ~500

Listing: Endangered

Range: Russian Far East, occasionally wandering over the border into China

Characteristics: The largest of all tiger subspecies, Amur tigers live in the wilderness of the Russian Far East where they prey on elk, sika deer, and wild boar. Because of the harsh habitat and low prey densities, Amur tigers require territories of up to 500 square miles. Amur tiger populations plummeted to a low of approximately 40 individuals in the 1940s, and declined drastically again just after the fall of the Soviet Union because of poaching for Chinese medicine and skins. Today, poaching remains a significant threat, in addition to illegal logging within their territories. Contrary to popular belief, Amur tigers are orange, not white. White tigers are an extremely rare recessive trait found primarily in Bengal tigers.



Indochinese Tiger

Panthera tigris corbetti

Population: ~350

Listing: Endangered

Range: Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam

Characteristics: Little is known about the Indochinese tiger because they live in the remote forests of Southeast Asia. More studies are needed to accurately determine their population numbers; however, they are almost certainly declining across their range due to habitat loss and poaching.

Sumatran Tiger

Panthera tigris sumatrae

Population: less than 300

Listing: Critically Endangered

Range: Island of Sumatra (Indonesia)

Characteristics: The smallest of all tiger subspecies, the Sumatran tiger lives in the remote forests of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. The smaller size of the Sumatran tiger can be attributed to the Bergmann Rule, which states that animals that live close to the equator are generally smaller than species living near the poles in order to more quickly dissipate heat. The greatest threat to Sumatran tigers is habitat loss from both legal and illegal palm oil plantations.

Malayan Tiger

Panthera tigris jacksoni

Population: ~300

Listing: Critically Endangered

Range: Peninsular Malaysia

Characteristics: The Malayan tiger is the newest of the nine tiger subspecies, officially recognized as a distinct subspecies from the Indochinese tiger by DNA testing in 2004. Found only in the Malay peninsula, one of the greatest threats to the Malayan tiger is believed to be human-tiger conflict as a result of them preying on livestock. Livestock predation occurs largely because of the loss of the tiger's habitat and prey animals, which include wild boar, sun bears, and multiple species of deer as a result of the rising human population in Malaysia.

South China Tiger

Panthera tigris amoyensis

Population: Believed to be extinct in the wild

Listing: Critically Endangered

Range: Historically, Southeast China

Characteristics: One of the most endangered animals in the world, the South China tiger is believed to be extinct in the wild, with Chinese zoos housing the only remaining members of this tiger subspecies. The population was decimated by Mao's Great Leap Forward when much of the tiger's habitat was lost to human development and tigers were hunted to extinction because they were viewed as pests.



Caspian Tiger

Panthera tigris virgata

Population: EXTINCT since 1968

Historic Range: Western China to the Caspian Sea in parts of Turkey

Characteristics: The Caspian tiger was once found throughout Central and West Asia, stretching from China through Iran and Turkey to the Caspian Sea. Recent genetic analysis has shown a remarkable similarity between Caspian and Amur tigers, which has led to discussions of reintroducing tigers from the Russian Far East into the Caspian tiger's former range. Russian president Vladimir Putin appears to be willing to follow through with a proposal submitted by the World Wildlife Fund to relocate tigers from Russia to the Amu Darya Delta in Kazakhstan.

Javan Tiger

Panthera tigris sondaica

Population: EXTINCT since 1980

Historic Range: Island of Java (Indonesia)

Characteristics: The most recent subspecies of tiger to go extinct. While not much is known about this subspecies, hunting and habitat loss were the two driving factors that led to its extinction.

Bali Tiger

Panthera tigris balica

Population: Extinct since 1940

Historic Range: Island of Bali (Indonesia)

Characteristics: Previously found only on the tiny Indonesian island of Bali, human population growth, habitat loss and poaching all contributed to this subspecies' demise.

White Tigers

Contrary to popular belief, white tigers are not a separate species or subspecies of tiger, nor are they Siberian tigers with white coats to better blend in with their snowy environments. White tigers are in fact the result of a genetic mutation caused by recessive alleles.

All white tigers in captivity have descended from one wild white Bengal tiger caught in the 1960s. As a result, all captive white tigers alive today are the product of relentless inbreeding and suffer from a number of genetic disorders. For this reason, AZA zoos have phased out white tigers from their Species Survival Plans.