

TIGERS

Tigers (*Panthera tigris*) are mammals of the Felidae family and one of four "big cats" in the *Panthera* genus. They are superpredators and the largest and most powerful living cat species in the world^{[2][3]}, comparable in size to the biggest fossil felids^[4]. The Royal Bengal Tiger is the most common subspecies of tiger, constituting approximately 80% of the entire tiger population, and is found in the Indian subcontinent. The tiger's beautiful blend of grace and ferocity led the legendary author and conservationist, Jim Corbett to remark - "The Tiger is a large hearted gentleman with boundless courage...".^[5] Most tigers live in forests or grasslands, for which their camouflage is ideally suited, and where it is easy to hunt prey that is faster or more agile. Among the big cats, only the tiger and jaguar are strong swimmers; tigers are often found bathing in ponds, lakes, and ivers. Tigers hunt alone and eat primarily medium to large sized herbivores such as Sambar Deer, wild pigs, gaur, and water buffalo. However, they also take smaller prey on occasion. Old and injured tigers have been known to take to easier prey such as humans or domestic cattle and are then termed as man-eaters or cattle-lifters which often leads to them being captured, shot or poisoned. Humans are the tiger's only true predator, as tigers are often poached illegally for their fur. Also, their bones and nearly all body parts are used in traditional Chinese medicine for a range of purported uses including pain killers and aphrodisiacs. Poaching for fur and destruction of habitat have greatly reduced tiger populations in the wild. A century ago, it is estimated there were over 100,000 tigers in the world; now numbers are down to below 2,500 mature breeding individuals, with no subpopulation containing more than 250 mature breeding individuals.

Tigers are the largest and heaviest cats in the world^[6]. Although different subspecies of tiger have different characteristics, in general male tigers weigh between 200 and 320 kg (440 lb and 700 lb) and females between 120 and 181 kg (265 lb and 400 lb). At an average, males are between 2.6 and 3.3 metres (8 feet 6 inches to 10 feet 8 inch) in length, and females are between 2.3 and 2.75 metres (7 ft 6 in and 9 ft) in length. Of the living subspecies, Sumatran tigers are the smallest, and Amur or Siberian Tigers are the largest. The stripes of most tigers vary from brown or hay to pure black, although white tigers have far fewer apparent stripes. White tigers are not a separate sub-species; They are leucistic Indian tigers. The form and density of stripes differs between subspecies, but most tigers have in excess of 100 stripes. The now extinct Javan tiger may have had far more than this. The pattern of stripes is unique to each animal, and thus could potentially be used to identify individuals, much in the same way as fingerprints are used to identify people. This is not, however, a preferred method of identification, due to the difficulty of recording the stripe pattern of a wild tiger. It seems likely that the function of stripes is camouflage, serving to hide these animals from their prey. The stripe pattern is found on a tiger's skin and if shaved, its distinctive camouflage pattern would be preserved. Like most cats, tigers are believed to have some degree of color vision. Several obscure references to various other tiger colors have also been found, including most notably, the reference to the "blue" or slate-colored tiger.

The Tiger is the national animal of:

- Bangladesh (Royal Bengal Tiger)
- China, along with Dragon and Panda; the Tiger is the unofficial symbol
- India (Royal Bengal Tiger)
- Malaysia
- Nepal (Royal Bengal Tiger)

- North Korea (Siberian Tiger)
- South Korea