



PANTHERA TIGRIS TIGRIS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Weighing in at over 250 kilograms and measuring over 13 feet in length, the Royal Bengal Tiger is the largest member of the *Felidae* (cat) family. With the ability to swim, climb trees and sprint at speeds over 55 km/h, the Bengal Tiger is arguably the most lethal of land predators, rivaled only by the Polar Bear. Of course, these two have probably never met given that the Bengal Tiger is native to the Indian sub-continent.
2. What's most important for a Bengal Tiger's survival, even more than its food and water, is its territory. Without territory, it may as well be a house cat, relying on others for its survival. It is only the Indian sub-continent that has managed to maintain large enough expanses of land and wildlife corridors to sustain a significant Bengal Tiger population. Of course, the tropical climate of the sub-continent aided by the presence of a healthy population of deer, wild boar, and donkeys make it a very conducive environment for the Bengal Tiger to grow and reproduce. While the ecosystem undoubtedly plays a role in the survival of the tiger, the tiger itself is an important lynchpin in the ecosystem. As apex predators, the population of tigers in an area is an excellent barometer of ecological health.
3. Its brute strength and size aside, the Bengal Tiger is recognized the world over because of its iconic orange and black coat. Year on end, tourists from all over the world pour into the sub-continent to catch a glimpse of the majestic big cat in the wild. In fact, wildlife tourism is a great source of revenue for the countries in the Indian sub-continent. Considered to belong to the Earth's 'Charismatic Megafauna', the Bengal Tiger holds immense symbolic value and is the National Animal of both India and Bangladesh. However, not everyone sees the value in preserving one of nature's greatest marvels.

MAN - ANIMAL CONFLICT

4. With over 3,000 tigers in its territory, India alone was home to far more Bengal Tigers than any other country in the world. India is simultaneously one of the most populous nations in the world with a population of over 1.3 billion and a density of 416 per sq. km. With such dense populations, conflict between man and animal is inevitable. In fact, several people live along the borders of national wildlife reserves in hutments. The wildlife reserves are home to the Bengal Tigers. The regions on the borders where people live are known as the buffer regions.
5. Sukrit, a 12-year-old village boy lived in the buffer region of the Ranthambore National Park, home to a large population of Bengal Tigers. One day he was out playing with his friends when a blood-curdling shriek caught their attention. More often than not, that meant a tiger had been spotted in the village. Amid the chaos, Sukrit sprinted home just in time to see the tiger dragging his little brother into the



dense forest shrubbery. The tiger disappeared into the thick, and Sukrit's brother was never seen again. What followed was a long bout of bitterness.

6. Years later, still thirsting for revenge, and riding on the back of the fact that one could earn up to \$50,000 for a single tiger in the Chinese market, Sukrit had formed a crew. The Chinese market had always paid a pretty penny for Tigers. Various parts of the tiger were consumed in several ways by the buyers in China. Though the Chinese maintain their own tiger farms to breed the big cats for consumption, the Bengal Tiger has always been considered exotic in many ways. To maximize this opportunity, Sukrit and his crew began to relentlessly and mercilessly poach wild tigers in India. Despite their best efforts, the forest guards were unable to track down Sukrit's crew. Armed with state-of-the-art technology, weapons, and tracking devices, the poachers were able to poach tigers and escape the authorities far too easily.
7. Finally, in early 2019 the last living tiger was poached and transported out of India. Once home to the biggest wild cat in Human memory, India was now devoid of its apex-predator. The big cat that had roamed the subcontinent for the past 15,000 years was now no more.

THE AFTERMATH

8. While the Chinese market was a beneficiary of the exploits of Sukrit's crew, India found itself on the brink of catastrophe. The Bengal Tiger was not merely a beautiful animal to look at. As the dominant predator of the ecosystem, it ensured that the number of herbivores like deer, and antelope was kept balanced. The sharp fall in their number from 3000 to 0 in the past few years has led to a huge increase in herbivore population. This, in turn, has led to the destruction of several forest habitats, as trees and shrubs have been consumed indiscriminately by the herbivores. Therefore, along with the tigers, even forests, nature's very own water catchment areas have begun to slowly fade away. Tigers were of tremendous ecological service in terms of carbon storage value. In their absence, climate change has been accelerated and the threat of co-extinction of other species looms large. It is known in the environmental community that the extinction of the top predator in an ecosystem means that the ecosystem itself may not last long thereafter.
9. Of course, the immediate impact of the missing tigers was felt immediately, but no one could predict just how disastrous this could prove to be. India has recognized the excessive harm it is sure to witness in the coming years. While it struggles to find a solution to its ecosystem, the first step on India's agenda is to prosecute Sukrit for his crimes. So far, this has proved to be difficult. Sukrit's group had been disbanded and Sukrit had moved to China where he enjoyed celebrity status. India is insisting that Sukrit be extradited so that he can answer for his crimes in India.



10. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has dismissed these calls for extradition. In their view, there was no evidence against Sukrit, and moreover, they hardly considered the killing of tigers to be such a big deal. The Chinese Ministry acknowledges that the market for Tiger parts has been booming in the past few years but denies any ties with poachers. It is their stance that the import of tiger parts into their ports is a legal activity since poaching is legal in Burma, and it is not possible for the customs authorities to know the nationality of the tiger.

11. It is well known that India was the only country where so many Royal Bengal Tigers could have come from. China's less than convincing justification has caused them to fall out of favor with the International Community. Many countries blame China for promoting poaching, which is now posing harm to the global community.

12. After extradition attempts failed, India approached the Court of Wildlife (CoW) to recover \$350 million in damages from China and have renewed their attempt to extradite Sukrit. The CoW has compulsory jurisdiction in matters like this and its orders are binding on the parties. Being all too aware of the CoW's wildlife 'friendly' approach, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has requested its counterpart in India to consider mediation. Additionally, China has also mentioned in its official communication that any extradition talks must involve a swap deal involving Sukrit and another important political prisoner, such as the Dalai Lama perhaps. Though concerned by the idea of such a swap, India has accepted China's request for Mediation. The Mediation is set to be conducted in the third week of October 2029 in Mumbai, India.