

# Viable tiger populations, tiger trade incompatible

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In the cover story of this month's *BioScience* journal, leading tiger experts warn that if tigers are to survive, governments must stop all trade in tiger products from wild and captive-bred sources, as well as ramp up efforts to conserve the species and their habitats. The paper, "The Fate of Wild Tigers," describes the wild tiger's population decline as "catastrophic" and urges international cooperation to ensure the animal's continued existence in the wild.

Habitat loss and intense poaching of tigers and their prey, combined with inadequate government efforts to maintain tiger populations, have resulted in a dramatic reduction in tiger numbers. These big cats now occupy just 7 percent of their historical range, according to the *BioScience* paper. And the possibility that China could reopen trade in parts harvested from farmed tigers represents a new threat, the authors say.

"A legal market in China for products made from farmed tigers will increase demand and allow criminals to 'launder' products made from tigers poached from the wild," said lead author Eric Dinerstein, chief scientist at World Wildlife Fund. "We're recommending that tiger range states and other governments with an interest in tiger conservation convene a high-level 'tiger summit' to address poaching, trade and habitat protection – urgently."

The peer-reviewed journal article was published as delegates from 171 nations gather here to discuss wildlife trade issues. It comes on the heels

of India's announcement that tiger numbers in central India are 60 percent lower than previously thought, news that illustrates the BioScience paper's assessment of "range collapse" across some of the tiger's remaining habitat.

To add to the tiger's woes, investors in massive tiger breeding centers in China are putting pressure on the Chinese government to lift its successful 14-year-old ban on trade in tiger bones so they can legally sell products like tiger bone wine.

"Countries with tigers must let China know that its 1993 ban on tiger trade has been a success in helping slow poaching of wild tigers and that the ban needs to remain in place," said Josh Ginsberg of the Wildlife Conservation Society and a co-author of the paper.

Source: World Wildlife Fund

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