

Study says 2000 tigers possible in Thailand

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Thailand's Western Forest Complex – a 6,900 square mile (18,000 square kilometers) network of parks and wildlife reserves – can potentially support some 2,000 tigers, making it one of the world's strongholds for these emblematic big cats, according to a new study by Thailand's Department of National Park, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation and the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society.

The study, which appears in latest issue of the journal *Oryx*, says that to make these numbers a reality, better enforcement to safeguard both tigers and their prey from poachers is critical.

According to the study, the entire Western Forest Complex currently supports an estimated 720 tigers. These tiger densities were lower than those reported by Wildlife Conservation Society scientists from some protected areas in India with similar habitat, but better enforcement. For example, tiger densities of as many as 12 tigers per 100 square kilometers were measured in India's Nagarhole, Bandipur and Kanha forests, as opposed to four tigers per 100 square kilometers in Thailand's Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary.

The authors of the study conducted intensive surveys of tigers in Huai Kha Khaeng, using camera traps to estimate a population size of 113 individual animals living in the 1,084 square-mile (2,810 square kilometer) protected area.

Despite the lower densities, plenty of good tiger habitat remains in Thailand, with 25 percent of the nation still forested, and 15 percent of it

managed under wildlife protection legislation.

“Thailand has the potential to be a global centerpiece for tiger conservation,” said Dr. Anak Pattanavibool of the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Thailand Program and a coauthor of the study. “This study underscores that there is an opportunity for tigers to thrive in Thailand – provided tigers and their major prey species are protected from poachers.”

“Working together with WCS scientists helps set a standard for tiger monitoring and conservation here in Thailand,” said Saksit Simcharoen, a tiger specialist working for the Thai government. “The tiger and prey population monitoring and patrol improvement systems have given people hope and direction to do better for tigers and other wildlife.”

Other Co-authors of the study included scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey.

Though no truly accurate global numbers exist, conservationists roughly estimate that 5,000 tigers remain in the wild. 150 years ago, an estimated 100,000 tigers may have roamed throughout much of Asia.

Last year, the Panthera Foundation in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society announced its “Tigers Forever” program that pledges a 50 percent increase in tiger numbers in key areas over the next decade.

Source: Wildlife Conservation Society

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