

WWF says China's wild tigers face extinction

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A tiger is seen in its enclosure at a zoo in Beijing. The World Wildlife Fund has warned that the wild tiger faced extinction in China after having been decimated by poaching and the destruction of its natural habitat.

The World Wildlife Fund warned on Tuesday that the wild tiger faced extinction in China after having been decimated by poaching and the destruction of its natural habitat.

"If there are no urgent measures taken, there is a high risk that the wild tiger will go extinct," Zhu Chunquan, conservation director of biodiversity at WWF China, said ahead of the start of the Year of the Tiger on February 14.

Zhu said that China's State Forestry Administration (SFA) estimated

there were only around 50 tigers left in the nation's wilderness.

"Globally, WWF estimates that if poaching and other threats continue, there are around 30 years left until tigers go extinct," he told AFP.

Loss and degradation of the tigers' habitat in China and poaching of the animals as well as their prey -- or source of food -- were behind the rapid disappearance of the animal, he added.

The SFA says around 20 Siberian tigers remain in China's northeast, 20 Bengal tigers in Tibet, and 10 Indochinese tigers in the southwest of the nation.

"As for the South China tiger, after the late 1970s, there has been no concrete evidence to show that there are any left," Zhu said.

In the 1950, about 4,000 of the South China variety roamed China, he said.

The WWF says on its website that the tiger is one of the top 10 species to watch in 2010, pointing out that there may be just 3,200 of the animals left globally in the wild.

[China](#) banned international trade in tiger bones and related products in 1993, Zhu said, but preventing all poaching and illegal trade remains a challenge.

Authorities in the Asian nation have in the past meted out heavy punishment to those found guilty of killing the endangered species.

In December, a man who shot dead an Indochinese [tiger](#) was sentenced to 12 years in prison and fined 580,000 yuan (85,000 dollars).

Zhu urged the Chinese government to raise awareness of the issue, by pushing people not to hunt the tiger's typical prey, which include [wild boar](#) and deer.

He added that local communities should be encouraged to find alternatives to livelihoods such as timber harvesting, as these activities contributed to the degradation and loss of the tiger's habitat.

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