

'Fewer than 50 wild tigers' left in China

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A South China tiger at a nature reserve in South Africa. Fewer than 50 wild tigers remain in China, a conservation group said as it voiced hope that the Year of the Tiger will not be the last for the endangered cats.

Fewer than 50 wild tigers remain in China, a conservation group said Monday, voicing hope that the Year of the Tiger would not be the last for the endangered cats.

Xie Yan, director of the [China](#) programme for the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), said that just 20 years ago tigers still roamed across large swathes of China.

But based on data from the year 2000, there are only around 15 Bengal

tigers left in Tibet, 10 Indochinese tigers in China's southwest, and around 20 Siberian tigers in the northeast, she told reporters.

And the South China tiger may already be extinct. According to the international conservation group WWF, none have been spotted in the wild since the late 1970s. In the 1950s, there were around 4,000.

Degradation of the animal's habitat and poaching of the tiger and its prey are blamed for its rapid disappearance.

China banned international trade in tiger bones and related products in 1993, but completely stamping out poaching and illegal trade has been a challenge due to weak law enforcement, experts say.

"Tiger conservation has been depressing for many years, (numbers) keep dropping and dropping," Xie said.

"But last year is the first year I've felt a lot of confidence from the support of the central government, the State Forestry Administration, and the local governments," she added.

"We see improvement in the management of nature reserves, we see the understanding of local communities, so I hope the tiger year will be the turning point for tiger conservation in China," she said, referring to the Chinese Year of the Tiger which starts on February 14.

China was among 13 Asian countries which last month pledged to double the number of wild tigers by the year 2022 and called for the protection of habitats to save the animals from extinction.

The global wild [tiger population](#) is estimated to be at an all-time low of 3,200, down from an estimated 20,000 in the 1980s and 100,000 a century ago.

Xie said the greatest hope for tigers in China was in the country's extreme northeast, which borders on Russia where hundreds of Siberian tigers live in the wild.

Authorities in the northeast are implementing several measures to protect the animal and one [nature reserve](#) in Jilin province has launched a tiger tourism programme, she said.

The Hunchun Nature Reserve started an annual [tiger](#) festival last year, and has plans to develop eco-tourism further with possible excursions into the wild, said Xie.

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