

China demand threatens tiger protection

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Soaring demand for tiger parts in China has emptied Asia's forests, frustrating efforts to protect the big cats, wildlife experts said as an anti-poaching conference opened in Kathmandu Monday.

Around 100 experts, government and [law enforcement officials](#) from 13 nations are attending the five-day summit, co-hosted by Nepal and

conservation group WWF to hammer out a regional plan to fight poaching.

Anil Manandhar from WWF Nepal said conservationists' goals should not be limited to "zero poaching but (include) zero demand as well".

Mike Baltzer, leader of WWF Tigers Alive Initiative, praised Beijing for its efforts to save the wild cats from extinction and said: "China is doing a lot but the demand (for [tiger](#) parts) is so huge that it's very difficult to address the issue".

"When you have a cultural perception among wealthy people in China that owning a tiger is a matter of prestige, you can't change it overnight," Baltzer told AFP on the sidelines of the conference.

"Dealing with demand will take a long time, poaching needs to be the focus otherwise it will be too late to save the tiger," he said.

Decades of trafficking and habitat destruction have slashed the global tiger population from 100,000 a century ago to approximately 3,000, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Tiger bones have long been an ingredient of traditional Chinese medicine, supposedly for a capacity to strengthen the human body.



Participants attend an anti-poaching summit in Kathmandu on February 2, 2015

The animal is also hunted for its pelt, which can fetch up to \$16,000 on the black market, and for its penis, believed to increase male sexual performance.

Conservationists singled out India and Nepal for their strong performance and urged other countries attending the summit to prioritise wildlife protection.

India in January reported a 30 percent jump in its tiger population since 2010, while Nepal saw numbers rise almost two thirds between 2009 and 2013.

Countries with tiger populations—Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam—in 2010 launched a plan to double their numbers by 2022.

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