

Wild Thai tiger cub footage sparks hope for endangered species

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Images of four mothers and six cubs, captured by camera traps in an eastern Thai jungle throughout 2016, confirm the presence of what is only the world's second known breeding population of the endangered Indochinese tiger

Conservationists on Tuesday hailed the discovery of a new breeding population of tigers in Thailand as a "miraculous" victory for a sub-species nearly wiped out by poaching.

Images of some tigers including six cubs, captured by camera traps in an eastern Thai jungle throughout 2016, confirm the presence of what is only the world's second known breeding population of the endangered Indochinese [tiger](#).

The only other growing population—the largest in the world with about three dozen tigers—is based in a western forest corridor in Thailand near the border with Myanmar.

"The extraordinary rebound of eastern Thailand's tigers is nothing short of miraculous," said John Goodrich, the tiger program director at Panthera, a wild cat preservation group that backed the survey.

The camera trap footage, which shows female tigers and their cubs traipsing through the leafy jungle, was captured with help from the anti-trafficking group Freeland and Thai park authorities.

Indochinese tigers, which are generally smaller than their Bengal and Siberian counterparts, once roamed across much of Asia.

But today only an estimated 221 remain, with the vast majority in Thailand and a handful in neighbouring Myanmar.

Aggressive poaching, weak law enforcement and habitat loss has rendered the animals all but extinct in southern China, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, according to scientists.

Tiger farms around the region have also boosted the trafficking trade by propping up demand for tiger parts, which are treasured as talismans and used in traditional medicines popular in China.

Conservationists and park officials attributed Thailand's success story to a rise in counter-poaching efforts over the past few decades.

But they warned that the breeding populations remained vulnerable and would not thrive without a sustained commitment to busting poachers and taking down the lucrative trafficking trade.

The Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai forest complex, where the latest young cubs were caught on some of the 156 cameras, still hosts a only modest tiger density of 0.63 tigers per 100 square kilometres.

It is a ratio on par with some of the world's most threatened tiger habitats, according to Freeland, but still means there is a population of at least 23 of the big beasts roaming wild.

"It's crucial to continue the great progress made by the Thai government to bolster protection for tigers at the frontlines," said Kraisak Choonhavan, the group's board chairman.

"As long as the illegal trade in tigers continues, they will need protection."

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