Ch 7 Central Case: Saving the Siberian Tiger

Tigers used to roam all over Asia, from Turkey to northeast Russia to Indonesia. Within the past 200 years, however, humans have driven tigers from most of their historic range. Three subspecies have already been lost forever; the remaining five subspecies are in danger of following them to extinction.

The largest surviving tiger subspecies is the Siberian tiger. Males of this variety can reach 12 feet in length and weigh up to 800 pounds. Siberian tigers live in the remote forests of the Sikhote-Alin Mountains in easternmost Russia. For thousands of years, Siberian tigers coexisted with the region’s native people. Called “Old Man” or “Grandfather,” Siberian tigers were viewed as guardians of the mountains and forests, and were only killed when they had preyed on a person.

New settlers to the region, however, had no such cultural traditions. They hunted tigers for sport and hides. Soon, there was a market for tiger skins, bones, and meat—especially in China and other Asian countries where tiger parts are used in traditional forms of medicine. Suddenly, dead tigers were worth a lot of money. At the same time, road building, logging, and agriculture fragmented the tiger’s habitat and provided easy access for hunters. The wild Siberian tiger population plummeted to just 20–30 animals.

Eventually, international conservation groups got involved, working with Russian biologists to save the remaining tigers. In 1992, one group helped launch the Siberian Tiger Project, devoted to studying the tiger and its habitat. The team worked closely with people living near an area of tiger habitat, educating them about the importance and value of their big cat neighbors.

Today, biologists use radio collars to track tigers, monitor their health, and determine causes of death when they die. They also provide funding for local wildlife officials to protect the tigers from hunters.

Thanks to such efforts, there are around 450–500 Siberian tigers in the wild today. About 500 more survive in zoos around the world. Hunting is still common, however, and there is no guarantee that the Siberian tiger population will continue to climb.

The map on the right shows the distribution of Siberian tiger monitoring sites in the Russian Far East. Categorized as protected or unprotected, the monitoring sites are scattered across Siberian tiger habitat. The tables below the map indicate the estimated number of tigers at each of the 16 sites in 2009, based on tiger track data.

![Image of tiger monitoring sites map]
Directions: Use the information in on the front to answer the questions below.

1. Were tigers always endangered? Explain your answer.
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2. Why are tigers in danger now? What threatens their population?
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3. What is being done to help the tigers?
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4. How many of the monitoring sites are protected areas? How many sites are unprotected?
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5. Which monitoring site is the farthest north? Which site is the farthest south?
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6. Based on the tiger estimates data, which of the protected monitoring sites has the smallest tiger population?
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7. If a conservation organization were interested in constructing a wildlife corridor within the Siberian tiger range, where would you suggest the corridor be constructed? Explain your answer.
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8. Should coastal areas or inland areas be the focus of conservation efforts for the Siberian tiger? Explain your answer.
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