Tigers: Extinction or Management?

The case for genetic management in a secured, self contained preserve could not be stronger. The alternative could well mean the extinction of the species. There are several significant points to consider as you read this summary.

- ***Tigers are vanishing in the wild at an ever increasing rate. This is due to the demand for tiger bone in traditional Chinese medicine, poaching, and habitat encroachment.***
- ***Zoos and small preserves are not equipped nor prepared to deal with poachers sent for tigers when they become extinct in the wild. This is inevitable.***

The ***Worst Case Scenario*** for the tiger would be a massive downturn of the economy on a sudden and International level. This could throw the world into economic chaos. The zoos and smaller preserves that depend on purchased or donated animal food will see their sources disappear. If some people begin to starve these animals would be taken for food. (This is the situation now going on in North Korea. Animals have disappeared from the countryside.)

As the world recovers from this catastrophe we find there are no more tigers! (Note: This is only a hypothetical possibility, and I hope one that never takes place, but history has a habit of repeating itself. This must be accounted for to guarantee the tiger's survival for future generations. Plans must be made for on site food production, power, and animal care.)

The other inevitability is poaching. The insatiable desire for tiger bone in the traditional oriental medicine trade drives this extremely lucrative market. The market will still exist when the tigers have disappeared in the wild. The new targets for well funded expert poaching squads will be zoos and private preserves. Neither is equipped to deal with this threat. The tiger will continue to disappear.

The following paragraphs highlight the problems' tigers face. The well meaning effort by scientists studying tigers in the wild has failed to protect the species. Much of the funding directed to these efforts is not well spent.

Here are a few paragraphs from a TRAFFIC report:

"The demand for tiger bone in traditional Chinese medicine is pushing three of the world's remaining five subspecies of tiger ever closer to extinction and threatening the long-term survival of the species as a whole. There are only an estimated 30 to 80 South China Tigers, 150 to 200 Siberian Tigers and 600 to 650 Sumatran Tigers left in the wild. Worldwide, tigers have vanished from much of their former range and may now number as few as 5,000.

Tigers could once be found from Bali to the Caspian Sea. As human populations grew, however, loss of habitat became the greatest threat to the species' survival. Habitat loss played a key role in the extinction of the Bali Tiger in the 1940s, the Caspian Tiger in the 1970s and the Javan Tiger, considered to have disappeared as recently as the 1980s. Today, the medicinal trade in tiger bone is proving just as deadly. Prime tiger habitat, such as that in the Russian Far East, may remain long after the last tiger is killed to supply the bone trade."

Michael Day of Tiger Trust in England reported that approximately 500 tigers were taken from India in 1995, one fifth of the remaining population. The WWF was maintaining that the tigers were coming back in India. Lies for dollars.

In a letter from a scientist in England comes this piece of information:

"I couldn't agree more with your comment on how scientists want to study the tiger in the wild until extinction. There was a recent broadcast on the 'Save the Tiger' update and Ullas Karanth was saying that he studied the tigers of Ranthambhore when there were about 30 known cats in the area, and now it appears there are less than five! How can they disappear under your very nose without drawing your attention? I find it all very odd to say the least."

Mr. Karanth is one of the leading tiger researchers in the scientific club. They will study tigers to death. Most are fixated on saving the individual subspecies. Case in point -- There is an estimated 40 South China Tigers in the wild with another 50 in captivity. (Note: Just recently Chinese officials admitted there has not been a South China Tiger seen in the wild since 1994.) Dr. Bleyman estimated that due to their confined region there was probably one or two unrelated pairs remaining. His research and genetic formulas state that to minimize genetic degradation you need a minimum of 13 unrelated pairs to maintain a species. 50 of the South China Tigers are in captivity, but the Chinese have asked for genetic expertise in managing the population. Too late. Unless the South China Tiger is out bread with another subspecies it is doomed to extinction. If it is out bread then you no longer have a true South China subspecies, and the scientists, in all their wisdom, do not like that.

Dr. Michael Bleyman wrote:

"…The Javan tiger became extinct in the 1970's in a set aside special national park under full protection.

Bureaucrats seem to be obsessed with numbers and not trends. Let us illustrate this with Tigers. At the Trust we frequently receive requests as to the exact number of tigers, or a tiger subspecies left in the world. We try to educate people with relation to the trend a population is taking, rather than the number as a slice in time. Just as you might say of a young member of the Hunt family, that they were very wealthy. A hypothetical individual was 24 years old and had $1,000,000. What isn't available in this one time analysis was that this Hunt inherited $24,000,000 at age 21, has no education nor ever worked. At Age 22 Hunt had $9,000,000 and at 23 had $4,000,000. Now instead of saying Hunt was rich, we would say Hunt is in trouble. Tigers are a great deal like Hunt.

The numbers that the Carnivore Preservation Trust has arrived at are our own estimates; they are highly educated guesses: Bengal tigers probably number fewer than 1000 in India. In a majority of that country it is hopelessly fragmented. It is, overall, actively poached. Fewer than 200 exist in Nepal and under 1000 exist in Myammar (Burma). Indochinese tigers are among 500 and 2000. CPT's guess is about 700 amidst heavy poaching. In the early sixties when the South China tiger had a population of about 4,000, Mao instituted a tiger eradication program. After Mao's death in 1976 the South China tiger population was reduced to 400. The Chinese government then instituted a Save the Tiger Program! South Chinese tiger is about 25, but the wild number is so inbred that the effective population number is more like four! The Siberian tiger number is between 125 and 175. (Closer to 125 according to the Russian scientist who wanted to recruit me for the genetic management of the free ranging Siberian tiger program in October 1995.)…"

We should be concerned with saving the tiger as a species before it is too late. As the Chinese become more affluent the money they pay for tiger bone will only increase. A boned out tiger now brings between $50,000 - $250,000 on the black market. This value will increase as tiger numbers decrease. How are tigers going to survive in the wild with that kind of pressure? There were over 40,000 at the turn of the century in India alone! One researcher said he thought the

Sumatran may have 50 years left before extinction. Poachers may have taken as many as 500 in one year from India. Estimates for Sumatrans run around 650, and that's if one believes the highly unreliable pug mark technique used to estimate these populations.

Banning tourism would possibly be the worst thing one could do. Dr. Bleyman instituted a major project in Laos where there resides panthera tigris corbetti (Indochinese tiger). He wanted many supervised people around, providing they did not disturb the environment. The more people that really care about the habitat, these are tourists as well as locals, the more eyes you have to spot and stop poachers. Tourism has to be organized and controlled, but it can be very helpful if done properly. The bottom line-habitats have to be maintained; not destroyed by mining, logging, farming, and human encroachment if the tiger is to be saved in the wild. This assumes you could eliminate poaching! Too many people and too much greed.

Paleocene Park must be developed as a means to guarantee the survival of the species. If some of these other tiger programs work I will be first to applaud their success. They have not worked, and they are not working now. The prudent accession is to develop Paleocene Park before the tiger is forever lost!

Footnote: There are smaller preserves that are loosing there places of existence as well as their animals as I write this article. Human encroachment is forcing local legislators to rezone properties due to pressure from wealthy builders who care more about how many matchbox houses they can place on an acre of land than they care about any animals, endangered or not. This situation will increasingly threaten and ultimately eliminate many small preserves that at one time seemed far from neighboring development, but now are in the path of relentless expansion.

When zoning laws are changed these animals usually cannot be placed with other facilities because they are filled to capacity. The owners lack the means to move these preserves so many endangered animals, including tigers, are put down.

Paleocene Park: The question remains, how will Paleocene Park be any different from the present zoos and smaller preserves? How will it guarantee the survival of the species?

First I would like to clarify the word Island. This does not mean a literal island surrounded by water. In the wild, tigers that are locked into small land areas surrounded by human development are said to be on islands.

Paleocene Park will incorporate concepts that will insure the continuation of the species, taking into account possible catastrophic events. These additions will include:

1. Acquisition of enough land area to buffer the actual compound so encroachment by developers will not be an issue. Area selection must look at topography, likelihood and prevalence of natural disasters, population trends, security objectives, and food production.

2. Internal food, power production, and animal care to insure continued operations.

3. Genetic management of the population.

4. Sophisticated security measures to protect the species from any attempted poaching or unauthorized entry.

5. Exquisite, massive natural habitats for all residents; tigers as well as other small carnivores.

This combination is needed to save a species as large and as sought after for profit as the tiger. No facility has all these elements in place. The Zoe Foundation, Inc. does not want to see the tiger go the way of the dinosaur. Paleocene Park will insure their survival until repopulation into safe, wild habitats becomes a reality, not a dream.

December 1998: A zoologist from Australia using sophisticated unmanned cameras has determined the tiger is far closer to extinction in the wild than previously assumed. In one Thai reserve of 80 square miles the team found only one tiger.