

## ***"This Studying Is Killing Us!"***

*by Jason Savage*

You might hear this from a wild tiger if they had the ability to communicate with Homosapiens; people in other words. How much more study of a species do we need when they are being crowded out and poached to death? Do we need to tranquilize another wild tiger for radio collar tracking when the anesthetic could kill? We already know where the tigers are! We know they're territorial, we know how they kill, we know how they mate, we know they will tear up a papier-mâché tiger when placed inside their enclosures, but first and foremost we know they're headed for **extinction**! All the study in the world is not going to stop that inevitability. Dr. Michael Bleyman, a leading zoologist and founder of the Carnivore Preservation Trust, once told me a representative from the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) stood up at a Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) meeting and stated that it was their intention to manage tigers in the wild until extinction. That sums it up pretty well.

Do scientists in the field really want to save these tigers or just keep their jobs? A friend in England who attended the 1997 *Tiger 2000 Symposium* in London wrote, "The tiger symposium was a big success !!! well...that is it attracted a lot of publicity and the jolly old UK government even threw in some research funds to boot!! The first day was concerned primarily with Tiger habitat and prey density...however at the risk of sounding bored, they might all have been reading directly from George Schallers 'The Deer and the Tiger'.... Anyway quite frankly, the more they talk- the less they say, and the less they say, the more it costs!! There will be an official report out soon although what great conclusions will remain to be seen."

There are exceptions, as my friend went on to state, "...Billy Arjan Singh, who I think is one of the few *genuine* tiger lovers in the world, threatened to operate a shoot to kill policy in order to preserve his tigers. The local Indian government had a lot of objections to this, and he almost succeeded by saying he was merely protecting his land..." This is the answer. You want to save tigers you initiate a shoot to kill policy against poachers. This is not likely to happen.

The following excerpt is from the Tiger Information Center's World Wide Web page, " On September 28, 1995 the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Exxon launched the Save the Tiger Fund (STF), an international effort to assist in the long-term survival of Asia's remaining populations of wild tigers. Exxon pledged \$5 million over five years to tiger conservation, one of the largest single corporate donations ever made for an endangered species. The establishment of the Save the Tiger Fund represents a real commitment by Exxon and the Foundation to save the tiger from extinction in the wild through the generous funding of a diverse and effective group of conservation projects. This sort of commitment is desperately needed; the wild tiger is more imperiled now than ever before, as increased poaching and relentless habitat loss threaten the tiger's survival throughout its range.

Now in its third year of operation, the Save the Tiger Fund has funded 41 projects with a total of \$3,348,712. Over \$200,000 of this funding has been raised from the general public. Thousands of individuals, from school children to business professionals, have joined Exxon and the Foundation in the effort to save the tiger, and their contributions are making an impact from the National Zoo in Washington, DC to Kaziranga National Park in the jungles of India..."

I invite you to visit their site at <http://www.5tigers.org> and read for yourself how this money is spent. You will find the majority of it going to more field studies and meetings. There is one project where the money went to buy two jeeps for an anti-poaching team. Two jeeps, more meetings, and a lot more study.

This is from the Director of TRAFFIC East Asia, "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."

Why put money into programs that sound good but are ineffective? Could publicity have anything to do with it? Tigers are a popular item.

Let's get down to some cold, hard reality. Field scientists are not going to save the tiger. Exxon is not going to save the tiger by putting their money into more field studies and meetings. Governments are not going to commit their militaries or significant funds to save these animals. With the value of a full grown, boned out tiger bringing upwards of \$100,000 (US) poachers will become more and more sophisticated. Eventually, when the tiger is gone in the wild new targets will be zoos and private preserves. *None* of these facilities is equipped to prevent the taking of their tigers, and these poaching teams will not be local villagers trying to make money to feed their families. These will be teams of ex-military paid huge sums for their expertise and efficiency. Make *no* mistake, the cartels that traffic in tiger bone will *not* cease this activity until *all* tigers are gone, or the people who ultimately purchase this contraband realize the error of their ways and no longer offer a lucrative market. No buyers, no poaching. This is not likely anytime soon. It will take many generations for the tiger bone myth to disappear into history.

So, its hopeless then! *No*, it is not hopeless. A plan has to be undertaken to ensure the survival of the species before its too late. We need a preserve that will incorporate the features necessary to effectively prevent the poaching of these magnificent animals by *any* para-military team and at the same time be able to provide genetic management, vast habitats, food, expert medical care, and visitor amenities including education and interaction with these creatures. All this is possible right now. There is nothing futuristic about it.

Let the scientists go about their business in the wild until there are no more tigers to study. This is a select 'club' that wants no more than funding and to be left alone. I personally have written to many of these leading scientists and have received no responses. It was an effort that needed to be made, but no more time will be spent in that pursuit. I am working to raise funds for this new tiger facility to be called *Tiger Island* in honor of the late Dr. Michael Bleyman. Proceeds from product sales will be used to develop this exquisite preserve.