

It is a desperate time for the world's tigers. There were once a lot of these majestic creatures throughout eastern and southern Asia. Now, wild tigers live only in small areas of India, China, eastern Russia, and a few other countries. Conservationists have been working for decades to save the big cats but the number of wild tigers continues to drop. There were an estimated 100,000 tigers living in the wild a century ago, compared with no more than 5,000 today. Now, a new conservation idea is being discussed that could stop wild tigers from becoming extinct?



As people change forests to cities and farms, tigers have lost their living areas. On top of that, poaching—the illegal hunting of wild animals—is a major threat to the cat's survival.

People sometimes hunt endangered species, like the tiger, to illegally sell the animal's body parts for souvenirs, medicines, and even food. Some people even pay high prices to buy tiger skins or other animal parts on the black market. By selling just one tiger, poachers can make enough money to live for a full year.

A lot of people think that the tiger can really heal people. For more than 3,000 years, Chinese medicine has used tiger parts to treat sickness and injury. Followers of this type of medicine believe that eating the animal's body parts will help cure diseases. For instance, a tonic made of tiger-bone powder and herbs is used to treat bone injuries and diseases, like arthritis, a painful inflammation of the body's joints.

Conservationists believe that a key to saving the world's wild tigers from extinction is to put an end to poaching of tigers. To achieve that more police need to be trained to catch the hunters and take them to court. In addition the selling and trading of products made from endangered species on the black market should be better controlled.

In China, there are establishments known as tiger farms. There, tourists are allowed to ride in protected cars and observe tigers. The animals live in cages like cows on a ranch, and are fed by human caretakers. Each year, dozens of the captive tigers die of natural causes. Some people believe that these tigers' parts should be sold for use in Chinese medicine.

Supporters of tiger-part farming say that this could help ward off poachers. They think that there are plenty of dead farmed tigers. If their body parts could be sold to medicine more easily the tigers' value would drop on the black market and poachers would not make as much money from selling wild tiger parts.

Most conservationists, however, do not want to test the idea. They don't believe farming will solve the problem. It costs as little as \$20 for someone to catch a tiger using a simple trap but it costs thousands of dollars for a farm to raise one tiger from youth until adulthood. Therefore it would stay profitable for poachers to continue to trap wild tigers.

Another fear is that poachers will sell wild-tiger parts but claim they came from farmed tigers. There is no way to tell the difference between a farmed and wild tiger.

The attitude may change if people become more educated about the plight of the animals and how endangered they are .

WORDS

- **achieve** = to make something possible
- **adulthood** = when you are grown up
- **attitude** = what someone thinks about something
- **black market** = when you buy and sell goods that are very difficult to get illegally
- **captive** = to keep in prison or a place that you cannot leave
- **caretaker** = a person who looks after another person or an animal
- **century** = a hundred years
- **claim** = say
- **compare** = to put two or more things side by side
- **conservationist** = a person who is worried about the world and wants to protect the animals and plants
- **court** = the place where a judge and a jury decide if a person is guilty or not
- **creature** = a living thing
- **cure** = to make healthy again
- **decade** = ten years
- **desperate** = bad
- **discuss** = to talk about
- **drop** = to go down
- **educate** = teach, inform
- **endangered species** = groups of animals that are in danger of dying out
- **establishment** = organisation
- **estimated** = about
- **extinct** = to die out
- **follower** = a person who follows this method
- **for instance** = for example
- **heal** = cure, make healthy again
- **herb** = a small plant that is used to make food taste better
- **illegal** = against the law
- **in addition** = also
- **inflammation** = when a part of your body swells, becomes red and feels hot
- **injury** = if you have hurt yourself
- **joint** = the part of your body where two bones get together
- **key** = an important part
- **majestic** = great
- **natural causes** = here: nobody killed them, they died naturally
- **plight** = the bad situation that the animals are in
- **poaching** = to catch and shoot animals illegally so that you can sell them or their parts
- **profitable** = to make money
- **protect** = defend, guard
- **raise** = bring up
- **solve** = to work out something
- **supporter** = a person who wants to help a group
- **survival** = to live on
- **threat** = danger
- **trap** = something that is used for catching animals
- **treat** = care for, heal
- **value** = the price that something has
- **ward off** = to try to protect yourself from something or someone