

THE PRESENT STATUS OF CHINESE TIGERS

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According to the latest information on the present status of the South China tiger (Panthera tigris amoyensis), the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The subspecies amoyensis still exists in the wild.
2. The population is very small. Almost all discoveries were sporadic and of lone animals.
3. They occur over an extensive range and are widely separated. Reports involve six provinces (Guangdong, Hunan, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hubei, Henan).
4. Although no pairing was seen, there were two reports involved females with young (north Guangdong, central Hunan), and several cases involved tiger cubs or young ones (east Hunan, east Fujian and east Guangdong), indicating that some breeding (although very little) continues in the wild.
5. Hunting and killing still occurs deep in the mountains, despite all the talk about conservation and the status of this First Class National Protected Animal. This is the most serious threat to the species' existence.

Recent reports of the South China tiger

Hunan Province

According to a report published by the Hunan Environmental Protection Journal on 6 November 1986, a young tiger of 24 kg was caught by a trap set for wild boar in the mountains of An Ren County (2670'N, 11330'E) near the Hunan-Jiangxi border, on 19 October. Despite urgent treatment it died of wounds on 21 October. The report said that the county government had issued a proclamation demanding serious protection for the remaining tigers in the mountains.

The Shanghai Wen Hui Bao reported on 23 May 1986 that a tiger was seen by Xie Guowu, a farmer, at the foot of the Niujiaoshan, near Li-ling (2760'N, 11350'E), in the early morning of 18 April 1986. Upon his yelling, dozens of people rushed to ascertain that it was a tiger. The report added that tigers were often seen there in the 1950's. This was the first appearance after a lapse of 30 years, perhaps a result of reforestation.

Kuang Ming Ri Bao reported on 24 May 1986: "Since South China tigers have reappeared more often in the mountain forests in eastern Hunan lately, the local authorities have decided to adopt more rigorous measures to protect them."

Jianxi Province

A report published by the China City Development Journal on 9 October 1986 said: "More than 20 South China tigers have been sighted lately in Ning-gang County (2670'N, 114E). Wildlife specialists opine that these tigers have

moved here from Hunan. The county government has decided to protect these tigers strictly."

(Comment by Tan: The number must be grossly exaggerated, although the presence of a few or even one or two repeatedly seen is possible.)

Hubei Province

A report published by the China Environment Journal on 1 April 1986 said: "Wild animals in Hubei forests are on the increase in recent years. The very endangered South China tiger has been rediscovered many times in the counties of Tongcheng (2925'N, 11380'E) and Lichuan (3030'N, 109E). Traces of tiger and leopard have also been found in the vicinity of Huangshi (3025'N, 115E) and Jingmen (31N, 11220'E). After an absence of 20 years, troops of monkeys have returned to Xingshan (3125'N, 11075'E) lately."

Henan Province

A conservation guard of the Baotianman Nature Reserve, Neixiang County (33N, 11180'E), in southwest Henan, discovered a South China tiger during his patrol very recently, according to the China Environment Journal on 7 June 1986. The tiger was seen lying in the woods at an elevation of 1700 m in the core of the reserve.

(Comment by Tan: Tigers had been reported more than once in this part of Henan in the 1950's and early 1960's.)

Fujian Province

A report published by the Guang Min Ri Bao on 18 August 1986 said: "A South China tiger was fired upon and wounded by two hunters in the Wuyishan Mountain Reserve in eastern Fujian on an early summer day this year. It was tied up and carried home to Xingcun (2770'N, 118E). Soldiers patrolling the mountains reported the matter to the command, who promptly despatched five officers led by a political commissioner to Xingcun and located the hunters and the tiger. A veterinarian was invited to treat the tiger's wound, and the hunters signed a written pledge not to hunt any more in the Wuyishan Nature Reserve. The tiger recovered in two or three weeks and was returned to the mountain by the officers and soldiers.

Another Guang Min Ri Bao report published by the daily on 21 March 1986 said: "A hunter carrying a young tiger (about 25-30 kg) in a cage was seen at the bus station at Pucheng (2790'N, 11850'E) in eastern Fujian, at noon of 18 February 1986. The tiger had been caught by a snare in the nearby mountains. A few days earlier, a dead young tiger was seen on sale in the street market of the same city."

A report by the China Environment Journal on 27 May 1986 said: "The illegal hunting and selling of wild animals around Yong-an (26N, 11740'E) is very serious lately. Incomplete statistics show that a total of one tiger, six young leopards, over a dozen black bears and numerous leopard-cats, monkeys and muntjacs have been killed in the last two years. The county government of Yong-an has issued another proclamation on the conservation of wildlife."

Guangdong Province

A report entitled "Preliminary Report on the Survey of South China Tiger in the Mountainous Area in Northern Guangdong", written by the Survey Unit of

South China Tiger Resources of the Institute of South China Endangered Wildlife in July 1986, was received in September 1986. The Survey Unit investigated northern Guangdong in December 1985 and in April-May 1986. According to spoor and droppings seen by the unit members and other data collected by them, it is estimated that "about five or six tigers are active in northern Guangdong." They recorded the following discoveries:

Yangshan (2450'N, 11250'E): Footprints, claw marks and droppings of a male tiger with an estimated weight of 100-130 kg were seen. Peasants had also seen a tigress with one or two (different opinions) cubs in recent months. Their range of activity includes mountains in both northern Guangdong and southern Hunan (Manshan).

Lianshan (2460'N, 112E): Unit members were told by the director of a local forestry station that some pigs were killed and carried away by tigers in March 1985. Field investigation conducted at Xiaosanjiang Mountain discovered tiger spoor left at two places about two months ago. The size of the spoors showed that it was a male tiger about 90-100 kg in weight.

Ren Hua (2515'N, 11370'E): Guo Chunlin, a hunter, saw two tigers when shooting at muntjacs one night in October 1985, at the Chengkow District on the Guangdong-Hunan border. He opened fire on one and lost sight of both. Ten days later, Wang Hesheng, a forest policeman, saw a single tiger while riding a motorcycle in the vicinity at night. In December 1985 a dog was carried off by a tiger. Investigation made in May 1986 discovered five spoors left a few days earlier. Width of the claw marks was 10-10.5 cm, made by a tigress.

Shixing (25N, 114E), Chebaling Nature Reserve: Tigers were seen by local miners in 1983 and 1984. The remains of a goat were discovered by miners in early May 1986. Tiger claw marks were seen on trees nearby. Investigation revealed a number of claw marks indicating a tigress of about 90 kg.

According to the investigators, the range of the South China tiger includes not only the northern Guangdong counties of Yangshan, Lianshan, Renhua, Shixing, Ruyuan and Lechang, but also Quan-nan (2460'N, 11450'E) in western Jiangxi, He-xi (2440'N, 11150') in eastern Guangxi, and Linwu (2530'N, 11250'E) and Yizhang (2545'N, 113E) in southern Hunan. In fact, the whole area can be regarded as a complete territory, which is also connected with counties such as Li-ling, An-ren, Guidong and Rucheng in eastern Hunan and Ning-gang in western Jiangxi. All these places were rich tiger countries before the anti-pest campaigns in the 1950's.

Another province likely to have a few more South China tigers is Guizhou, where no investigation has been carried out yet.

The Status of other Tiger Subspecies in China

The status of other tiger subspecies is also not very encouraging. At a conference in the Ministry of Forestry recently on conservation problems, participants signed a manifesto calling for the urgent rescue of the Northeast China tiger (Panthera tigris altaica), whose wild population has declined from more than 80 in the 1970's to the present 20-30, chiefly due to poaching and deforestation.

Another petition, signed by nine Shanghai university teachers doing a three-week investigation in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province in April 1980, suggested that the establishment of a Xishuangbanna conservation and development committee is urgently needed. The petition was published by the Shanghai Wen Hui Bao on 21 June 1986. According to their statement, the percentage of forest cover of Xishuangbanna has been reduced from 55% to 28%, that is, from about 1,056,000 ha in the 1950's to about 535,000 ha nowadays. They learned that a total of 12 Yunnan tigers (Panthera tigris tigris or corbetti), 32 Asiatic elephant and 110 gaur, besides leopard, sambar, monkey, etc. were illegally hunted from 1979 to the Spring of 1986. They saw hunters carrying guns in the forests without interference.

A Xinhua report from Kunming dated 4 December says a wild tiger appeared in the suburbs of the Yunnan capital city in the early morning of 3 December, killing two persons and injuring three. A squad of police arrived and shot it on the spot. The China Environment Journal suggested that the 160 kg tiger could have been an escapee from smugglers, because no tiger had escaped from any zoo and it is impossible for any wild tigers to travel such a long distance from Xishuangbanna or the southwest border area to Kunming without being seen. The incident was a result of bad management of wildlife control, the report added.

Ren Min Ri Bao (The People's Daily) published a letter to the editor on 24 July 1986 appealing for the tightening of control over the manufacture of medicine containing tiger bone. Xu Zunben of the Hunan Pharmaceutical Company wrote that, according to the China Pharmacopoeia of 1985, there are 25 kinds of Chinese medicinal drugs containing such elements, and over 110 pharmaceutical factories are producing such medicines. The continued purchase of tiger bone is considered the most important cause of tiger poaching in China. Xu added that an adult altaica tigress can yield 7,250 g of dried bone. To manufacture medicinal liquor, 55 kg of tiger bone wine requires 250 g of tiger bone. Accordingly, if all the 116 factories were producing medicinal liquor at full capacity, it would require more bones than the total Chinese tiger population could supply. Xu suggested (1) rearing tigers in captivity for medicinal supply or (2) finding substitutes for the tiger bone.

Tan learned from private sources that Chinese enterprises continue to import tiger bone, mainly from Burma, for medicinal use at the staggering price of nearly US\$100 per catty (1/2 kg). Recently the Shenyang (Mukden) Zoo sold the 18 kg skeleton of a dead tiger (altaica) for 13,000 yuan or approximately US\$3,500.

TIGER STUDBOOK

There were 677 (363.314) Siberian tigers P.t. altaica living in captivity at the end of 1985, according to the International Tiger Studbook kept by Professor Dr Siegfried Seifert at Leipzig. Of the 677, those caught in the wild numbered 89 (45.44).

Captive Sumatran tigers P.t. sumatrae in the studbook numbered 168 (73.95), of which 26 (13.13) were wild caught.

Dr Seifert noted that these were tigers about which information had been received. There might be others alive which had been registered but about which no information had been received.