

TIGER

THE VORACIOUS BLACK-STRIPPED FELINE



A tiger peers at a camera trap it triggered while hunting in the morning in the forests of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. Tigers can thrive in many habitats, from the frigid Himalaya to tropical mangrove swamps in India and Bangladesh.

A LOOK AT A MIGHTY CAT

Dawn, and mist holds the forest. Only a short stretch of red dirt track can be seen. Suddenly a tigress ambles into view. First she stops to rub her right-side whiskers against a roadside tree. Then she crosses the road and rubs her left-side whiskers. Then she turns to regard us with a look of infinite and bored indifference.

And then, as if relenting, she reaches up the tree to claw the bark, turning her profile to us, and with it the full impact of her tigerness—the improbable, the gorgeous, the iconographic and visibly powerful flanks. The tiger.

The Panthera tigers is the largest of all the big cats and is one of the most formidable carnivores on the planet, and yet, amber-coated and patterned with black flames, one of the most beautiful of creatures.

WHY SO VORACIOUS?

Consider the tiger, how he is formed. With claws up to four inches long and retractable, like a domestic cat's, and carnassial teeth that shatter bone. While able to achieve bursts above 35 miles an hour, the tiger is built for strength, not sustained speed. Short, powerful legs propel his trademark lethal lunge and fabled leaps.

Recently, a tiger was captured on video jumping from flat ground to 13 feet in the air to attack a ranger riding an elephant. The eye of the tiger is backlit by a membrane that is able to reflect light through the

retina, the secret of his famous night vision and glowing night eyes. The roar of the tiger can carry more than a mile. The tiger is powerful enough to kill and drag prey five times its weight, yet it can move through high grass, forest, and even water in unnerving silence.

DID YOU KNOW...



...the tiger cubs nurse their mother until they are about 24 weeks old after their birth.

...the female tiger begins to bring the cubs prey to eat such as: buffalo, wild pigs, deer and other meaty prey.

...the cubs cannot hunt on their own until they are approximately one and a half years old.

...after about two or three years with their mother, the cubs establish their own territories. Sometimes, especially if the cub is a female, this new territory is close to the mother's.

THE SAD TRUTH

The common refrain of those who have witnessed an attack is that the tiger “came from nowhere.” But the other reason for the dearth of sightings is that the ideal tiger landscapes have very few tigers. The tiger has been a threatened species for most of my lifetime, and its rareness has come to be regarded as an intrinsic, defining attribute. The complacent view that the tiger will continue to be “rare” into the foreseeable future is no longer tenable.

In the early 21st century, tigers in the wild face the black abyss of annihilation. The tiger's enemies are well-known: Loss of habitat exacerbated by exploding human populations, poverty and looming over all, the dark threat of the brutal Chinese black market for tiger parts. Less acknowledged are botched conservation strategies that for decades have failed the tiger. The tiger population, dispersed among Asia's 13 tiger countries, is estimated at fewer than 4,000 animals,

SCIENTISTS AGREE

Though many conservationists believe there are hundreds less than that. To put this number in perspective: Global alarm for the species was first sounded in 1969, and early in the '80s it was estimated that some 8,000 tigers remained in the wild. So decades of vociferously expressed concern for tigers—not to mention millions of dollars donated by well-meaning individuals—has achieved the demise of perhaps half of the already imperiled population.

MANTA RAY

THE FILTER FEEDER GENTLE GIANT



As plankton swarms accumulate, mantas come to feast. The total Maldives population is estimated at 10,000 individuals. These mantas may soon swirl into a spiral formation for cyclone feeding—behavior rarely seen outside of Hanifaru Bay.

WHO IS THE MANTA RAY?

The Manta Ray is one of the most fascinating and amazing creatures in the water. We don't know very much about them which is part of the reason why researchers continue to be fascinated by them. It is believed that the Manta Ray evolved millions of years ago into the creature we know it to be today. They are very large creatures, with only the shark and whale being larger than they are. If you pay close attention to popular culture you will quickly see the Manta Ray being there in various forms. Some of it has to do with early beliefs such as that of the people of Peru. More recently are the various documentaries on these creatures. The anatomy of the Manta Ray is one that fascinates researchers. It is well designed to help them adapt and to survive in their natural environment.

A MYSTERY

Many people don't know a great deal about the Manta Ray, and that is likely due to there not being much researchers have uncovered about them. A great deal about their life continues to be quite a mystery. We do know the basics about them though. For example the Manta Ray lives in either tropic or sub tropic waters. It is a filter feeder and consumes large amounts of food every day. The actual reproduction for these animals seems to be complex.

The males are very aggressive and they have to fight hard to find a female. This is due to there being so many more males than females out there. A reason why we

don't see many Manta Rays in captivity is due to their very large size. It is extremely expensive to create an environment that offers them the space they need. There are only four of them right now in captivity. One of them lives in a tank that holds 60 million gallons of water!

DID YOU KNOW...



...For the Manta Ray maturity to reproduce is dependent upon size rather than age.

...For the males it is when they are approximately thirteen-fifteen feet in length.

...For the females it is when they are approximately sixteen-eighteen feet in length.

...The males are very aggressive when it comes to the actual mating process. You will often notice that the females have bite marks all over their skin from the interaction between the mates.

THE RAY'S PREDATORS

In the past, large numbers of them have been hunted for the sport of it, for meat, oil, and even to allow commercial hunters to have more access to the items that the Manta Ray consumes in their daily diet. Today the hunting of them is limited, especially in the United States. Those that live around the area of Hawaii are the most protected due to the low number. They also bring in a huge number of tourists that come to explore the waters with the Manta Ray in them. Since we don't know what the future holds for them, it is even more important to protect them. Hopefully studies can one day soon be conducted that help us to identify just how many of the various species remain out there in the world. This would result in a plan of action that would be easier to get into place.

IRONICALLY

Manta Rays are very gentle creatures. Yet the movies about them portray them as sea creatures that will consume people. These early movies are based on information that they had at that time which was very little. It wasn't until much later that the truth was learned about them. Should you want a good laugh though check them out to see how these creatures are portrayed. Your options include The Sea Bat from 1930 and the Devil Monster from 1946. And there tends to be many more males than females so there's plenty of competition to mate. This is why males can be very aggressive against each other for the right to mate with the females.