

# Less than 400 tigers in the wild

By Brian 4N

## SUMATRAN TIGER FACTS

- The Sumatran Tiger is the smallest of the 5 subspecies still surviving.
- Full grown males only weigh up to 139kg.
- The tiger's whiskers are just a little longer than the width of its body. This helps them navigate in the dark, dense undergrowth.
- It has webbed toes which makes them very good swimmers.
- Less than 40 years ago, their population was estimated at 1,000.
- Deforestation and poaching in Indonesia could see their extinction from Indonesia.

With less than 400 Sumatran Tigers left in the wild, Taronga Zoo has stepped up its support of this critically endangered species to ensure it survives long-term.

Our generation could see the extinction of Sumatran Tigers in six years if nothing is done to prevent the widespread habitat destruction associated with palm oil production and poaching in Indonesia. They are currently listed as the most endangered out of 5 subspecies of tigers, sitting on the Red List's critically endangered category.

Although it is illegal to kill Sumatran Tigers in Indonesia and people caught can be sent to jail, the lure of money for poorer locals has proven too strong. Poachers are killing these iconic Indonesian creatures so they can sell their body parts for use in traditional medicine and their pelts as trophies on the Asian markets. This trade in has created a highly lucrative industry that the world has yet to eradicate.



- They are found in South East Asia on a tiny island known as Sumatra.
- They are generally very shy and try to avoid people.
- They hunt wild deer species.

According to the wild life trade monitoring arm of WWF and IUCN, poachers kill at least 40 Sumatran tigers per year, and killing is made that much easier as their habitat shrinks.

The rapid growth of palm oil plantations on native habitat in Sumatra, has lowered the area of habitat for this tiger. This reduction in habitat is a major problem as it has resulted in a decline in the population of their prey. This decline in the population of their food source has seen many tigers die of starvation.

Sadly, poaching isn't the only threat to Sumatran Tigers, but like the poaching, humans are the culprit.

Over the years, Sumatran Tiger have lost 93% of their native habitats because of one main reason, palm oil plantations. Like poaching, the palm oil industry is a lucrative one, with thousands of everyday products including shampoo, chocolate and soap all containing palm oil. Unfortunately, some of these products contain unsustainable palm oil, and it is this type of palm oil that is having such a devastating effect on the tiger population.

"It affects Sumatran Tigers because it can take away Sumatran Tiger habitat. So lots of the rainforests where Sumatran Tigers like to live are being cleared," Ben, a Taronga zookeeper said about the clearing of native forests for plantations.

Every hour approximately 300 football fields are being cleared for palm oil plantation which is problematic for Sumatran Tigers as they are no longer able to "blend in[to] the background," said Ben. Worse still, part of the clearing process involves burning down native forests so the land is free to cultivate palm oil trees. However, this is making it easier for poachers to find and kill what little tigers are left out in the open.

If people purchase unsustainable palm oil then they are inadvertently helping in the demise of Indonesia's iconic creature. There is a solution though.

"People can buy palm oil products sustainably," said Ben, a zookeeper from Taronga Zoo.

The next time you go shopping, look for products containing the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) label. This label will help you identify sustainably sourced palm oil products. The label shows a palm leaf surrounded by the words, RSPO and Certified Sustainable Palm Oil.

In 1978 a tiger census reported around 1,000 Sumatran Tigers were still in the wild. That means over the last 40 years their population has dropped by more than half, mainly because of us, humans, their main predator. These magnificent cats are disappearing rapidly and if nothing is done, at these rates Sumatran Tigers will be extinct in the wild in less than 30 years.

Sumatran Tigers are critically endangered and should be protected by us but not starved to death or killed by the hand of poachers.