

Amur Tigers: Big Cats in Crisis

Amur tigers, also known as Siberian tigers, are interesting animals. They are the biggest cats in the world. A full-grown Amur tiger can weigh over 600 pounds. Unlike lions that live in groups, tigers are solitary animals, meaning they live alone. Tigers also have very good eyesight and hearing. Its eyesight is six times better than a human's.

Amur tigers live in the forests located in the Russian Far East and northeastern China. They have a thick yellow fur coat with black stripes. Their stripes are like human fingerprints. Every tiger has a different and unique stripe pattern. Tigers use their striped coat to camouflage, or hide, themselves from the animals they hunt. Their thick fur and a thick layer of fat keep them warm during the long, cold winters in the forest. The fur and fat layer are adaptations, or changes, that help them survive in the wild.

Powerful and quiet hunters, Amur tigers usually hunt at night. Animals that are active at night are called nocturnal animals. Sometimes these tigers travel hundreds of miles looking for prey to eat. They hunt deer and wild boar that live in the forest. They also hunt smaller types of bears. A hungry Amur tiger can eat more than 50 pounds in one night.

Today, Amur tigers are an endangered species. Endangered species are animals that are in danger of disappearing forever. Snow leopards, chimpanzees, and blue whales are also endangered species. Amur tigers almost disappeared forever at the beginning of the 20th century. They were hunted until only 40 tigers remained in the wild. Countries like Russia then began to protect these big cats. They made it illegal to hunt them, and they tried to protect their forest habitat. After these changes, the number of Amur tigers living in the wild increased. Scientists believe there are about 540 Amur tigers living in the wild today.

These big cats are still in crisis. People continue to illegally hunt Amur tigers. Illegal hunting is called poaching. Amur tigers are also still in danger because the forests they live in are being destroyed. Illegal logging and new roads destroy their forest homes. It makes it hard for the tigers to find prey to eat. It also makes it difficult for the tigers to roam for long distances. Many organizations and people are trying to save these tigers in the wild. Organizations that work to save animals and the environment are called conservation organizations. They are trying to stop poaching. They are also trying to protect the tiger's forest.

Questions

1. List three facts about Amur tigers.
2. What does “endangered species” mean?
3. What does “nocturnal animals” mean?
4. What dangers do Amur tigers face in the wild?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. solitary
2. unique
3. camouflage
4. endangered
5. species
6. habitat
7. crisis
8. roam

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

- 1) "Unlike lions that live in groups, tigers are **solitary** animals, meaning they live alone"
a. unaccompanied; alone b. striped or lined c. living at night; nocturnal d. grouchy
- 2) "Every tiger has a different and **unique** stripe pattern"
a. single color b. repeating or duplicating c. handsome or pretty d. one of a kind; special
- 3) "Tigers use their striped coat to **camouflage**, or hide, themselves from the animals they hunt"
a. alert or warn b. disguise; mask c. protect or defend d. silence; keep quiet
- 4) "Amur tigers are an **endangered** species"
a. in trouble; at risk of dying out b. dangerous; deadly c. old or ancient d. beautiful
- 5) "Amur tigers are an endangered **species**"
a. hunters or stalkers b. meat eater c. group of similar organisms; breed d. swimmers
- 6) "they tried to protect their forest **habitat**"
a. paths; roads b. residents or family c. food; meat d. home territory or environment
- 7) "These big cats are still in **crisis**"
a. living; existence b. turning point or emergency c. forests or jungles d. popularity; demand
- 8) "It also makes it difficult for the tigers to **roam** for long distances"
a. swim or paddle b. smell; scent c. travel freely; prowl d. communicate