

Understanding Wild Tigers

Kids for Tigers naturalists will visit your school to show students a slide show on the natural history of wild tigers. Here are some .questions, with answers, that may crop up after the slide show.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. 1. What is extinction?

A. 1. Extinction is the wiping out of every last representative of a living species. For instance, the Dodo, a flightless bird that lived in Mauritius and was believed to be distantly related to the pigeon family, became extinct in 1691 because sailors slaughtered it in large numbers for the value of its fat, feathers and meat.

Q.2. Why is Kids for Tigers only trying to save the tiger and not other animals?

A. 2. 'Kids for Tigers' aims at saving ALL wildlife. The tiger is only a symbol, just like the national flag is a symbol for our nation. We can only save the tiger by saving its forest and the deer, wild boar and monkeys on which the tiger preys. Automatically birds that nest in trees, ants that live in grasslands, lizards and snakes that live in burrows and even butterflies that flit from flower to flower are saved. In Manas, elephants were saved while trying to save tigers. In Kanha the endangered hardground barasingha deer received protection.

Q. 3. How many tigers are there in India? How do we count tigers?

A. 3. No one can count tigers exactly. We can only *estimate* how many tigers there may be in a forest. In the old days people used to estimate tigers by counting pugmarks. But we know today that this can lead to errors and that a variety of methods must be used, including pugmarks, visual sightings at waterholes, scats, photo-trapping, etc. Park managers generally conduct tiger estimations in summer, when water is scarce and animals have to visit waterholes. The number of chital, sambar, wild boar and other prey species determines how many tigers can be supported in a particular area.

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Q. 4. When do young cubs start accompanying their mothers on walks?

A. 4. When they are three to four months old and then too, only for short walks.

Q. 5. Do male tigers kill their own cubs?

A. 5. No. But they may sometimes kill cubs belonging to other males.

Q. 6. How often do tigers hunt?

A. 6. Males that need only to feed themselves will may kill around 60 medium-sized deer (or wild boar) in a year. A tigress with two to three cubs to feed, needs to kill more prey, perhaps as many as 100 deer.

Q. 7. What area does a tiger need to survive?

A. 7. This depends on the quantity of prey, availability of water, how undisturbed the area is, etc. In some parts of India, male tigers may claim territories of over 200 sq. km. Within this territory, several females may be found. In Siberia, because prey animals are scarce, a male tiger may need as much as 800 sq. km. to survive.

Q. 8. Why save tigers when there are so many poor people in India?

A. 8. By saving the tiger and its forests, we are actually saving human beings because the tigers' forests are our best sources for fresh water. These forests soak up the monsoon rain for four months and then release the water for us to use all year round. The tigers' forests also protect our soils and are the source of wild food seeds that may help humans to avoid starving in the future.

Q. 9. Are jaguars found in India?

A. 9. Jaguars are NOT found in India. They belong to the dense forests of South America, and kill by ambushing their prey. Like the leopards found in India, the spotted patterns on their coats make it very difficult to locate them in their forest homes.

Q. 10. Are cheetahs found in India?

A. 10. They used to be, but have been extinct here since 1948. In the early '70s a family of cheetahs was filmed near Tabas, in the Khorasan province of Iran. People want to reintroduce cheetahs in India, but their scrub habitats have been destroyed and reintroduced cheetahs may not survive.

Q. 11. What are white tigers? How do they differ from normal tigers?

A. 11. White tigers belong to the same species as normal tigers, *Panthera tigris*. The Maharaja of Rewa first discovered a wild white tiger cub in 1951 (three cubs from the litter were orange). He called the cub, Mohan. All white tigers in the world are descended from this one cub. Genetic mutation results in their skin lacking a pigment called melanin. White tigers are not albinos.

Q. 12. Why is the lion found only in one small forest in India?

A. 12. Lions once ranged from Asia Minor to the northern Indian plains and along the Narmada river. However, lions have been killed mercilessly and their forests converted to farms, thus making it impossible for them to survive. Thanks to farsighted individuals the Gir Forest in Kathiawar, Saurashtra, Gujarat was protected especially for lions. Efforts are on to find another home for them in Madhya Pradesh in the forests of Palpur Kuno, where they would have to share the habitat with tigers!

Q.13. Where are Great Indian Bustards found?

A 13. These endangered birds are found in dry grasslands and scrub habitats in parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

Q. 14. Where are wild asses found? What do they eat?

A. 14. Wild asses have adapted to life in the harsh, featureless Rann of Kutch. They eat green plants and grasses and even fruit that grow along the fringes of the Rann and on small 'bets' or hillocks that become islands when the sea water floods the flatlands during and after the monsoon. They can go for very long periods without drinking water as they obtain it from plants. Wild asses that are closely related to the herds of the Rann are also found in the cold deserts of the high plateau of Tibet.

Q. 15. Where do red pandas live and what do they eat?

A. 15. They live in the temperate forests of the Himalaya above 1,700 m. They are good climbers and thrive on bamboo, fruit, insects, birds and mammals.

Q. 16. Which is the longest and heaviest snake in the world?

A. 16. The longest snake in the world is the reticulated python. The largest known specimen measured over 10 metres. Reticulated pythons are also

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found in the Andaman Islands. The heaviest snake in the world is the anaconda, which is found in South America.

Q. 17. How can children really help to prevent poaching and forest destruction?

A. 17. Children can help by reminding adults of their responsibilities. When children speak to their parents, or write letters to Prime Ministers, editors of papers, etc. they have a very major impact on grown ups. Also, children can influence decisions in the family. For instance, not to buy any products made of ivory or other wild animal parts. Some children are also asking their parents and teachers not to vote for those who destroy forests.

Q. 18. How does nature take care of waste?

A. 18. There is no such thing as 'waste' in nature! Every single resource is used and reused. Even elephant dung, for instance, is eaten by beetles. And when a deer dies, flies, ants and beetles will consume every last bit of the carcass after carnivores, crows, vultures and hyaenas have had their fill. Bacteria, fungi and mosses also help to break down organic matter, thus returning nutrients to the soil. Even 'dirty' water is cleaned by aquatic organisms including fish, crabs, frogs and dragonfly larvae. NOTHING in nature is wasted. The only animal which knows how to waste things is... man!

Q. 19. Jim Corbett killed so many tigers, why was he so popular?

A. 19. When he lived, killing tigers was considered a popular 'sport' and his stories won him lots of popularity. But the best natural history writings about the tiger and its forests were the work of a man called F. W. Champion, who felt that shooting tigers was cruel and pointless. In the latter part of his life, 'Gentleman Jim' Corbett also turned *away* from shikar. He began to protect tigers and their forests.

Q. 20. Which is the most dangerous animal in the world?

A. 20. *Homo sapiens* (that's you and me!).