

## Lesson 5










### *The Tiger, Panthera tigris*

**OBJECTIVE:** To communicate the concept that India's forests and natural wealth are at the core of the country's ecological health. By saving the tiger, we are saving our forests, our water supplies, and India's ecological foundation.

**AIM:** To convey to children the charisma of the tiger, its present distribution and endangered status. To help children understand that protecting the tiger means protecting our diverse ecosystems and our scarce water supplies.

**INTRODUCTION:** To study the tiger, how it lives, hunts and what it needs to survive.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

-  How many children have seen the tiger in the wild and where?
-  Show soft moments such as tigers with cubs.
-  Name some of the prey species of the tiger.
-  Correlate mannerisms of the domestic cat with those of the tiger.
-  Indicate past distribution and range of tigers on a map. Compare and contrast with the present distribution.
-  Introduce the five surviving species of tigers and their geography.
-  India is home to the largest number of tigers; Project Tiger's history, the areas covered under Project Tiger, role of late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.
-  Problems faced like the need for forest corridors, recent press clippings of skin seizures.
-  Emphasise that the tiger is a 'star' indicator species. In its forest home millions of other creatures survive.

**AIDS:** Pictures, film, 'Kids for Tigers' website.

**BLACKBOARD:** Map of distribution and threats, list of rivers flowing out of tiger habitats (e.g. Narmada).

**EVALUATION:** Questions on species and numbers.  
Play-acting the mannerisms and behaviour of the tiger.  
Debate on the use of animal skins.

Questions inviting suggestions on what needs to be done. Nature Quiz.

## *The Tiger, Panthera tigris*





**Description:** The tiger is India's national animal and is the largest and most powerful member of the cat family, *Felidae*, which includes all cats – lions, leopards and even our domestic cat.

The tiger is a carnivore or meat-eating animal. The average male tiger weighs about 180-200 kg. and the female about 140 kg.

**Habitat:** Tigers live in monsoon forests, dry scrub, mangrove swamps and the cold, frosty northern forests. In India, tigers live in dry thorn scrub and evergreen habitats. Unlike the lion, which likes open country, the tiger, a secretive animal prefers thicker forests and terai grasslands. The tiger can also live in hot places like the bamboo jungles or the rainforests of Malaysia and even in very cold places like snowy Siberia.

**Prey species:** Deer and wild boar are the mainstay of the tiger's diet. But it also feeds on gaur or bison, young elephant and rhinoceros calves, and even cattle, monkeys, crabs, turtles, fish, lizards and birds like peacocks.

### Family life

-  When a female tiger is ready to start a family, she calls out loudly to ask a male to join her.
-  The pair stays together for two or three days, cuddling and playing.
-  About 100 days after mating, the mother bears two to four small, blind cubs in a litter.
-  The babies spend almost two years with their mother, which is when she teaches them to hunt for themselves.

### Project Tiger

Project Tiger has been one of the world's most successful conservation projects. The effort was executed and managed entirely by Indians such as Kailash Sankhala, the first Director of the Project and Fateh Singh Rathore and H.S. Panwar, the Field Directors of Ranthambhore and Kanha respectively. In the 1970s, when the project was launched, the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi gave our forest officers a free hand and they quickly set about restoring tiger forests with help from a team of dedicated foresters, guided by the philosophy: "do nothing in the jungle and allow nothing

## Lesson 5

### *The Tiger, Panthera tigris*

to be done.” Within a decade, once-dry rivulets and springs began to run full, new grasses and trees sprang up... and tigers, turtles and termites began to thrive.

However, all is not well with the tiger today. After Mrs. Indira Gandhi's sad death in 1984, commercial exploitation of tiger habitats in India began to pose an even greater threat to the species than poaching. Culprits include mines, dams, roads, pollution by thermal plants and even tourism projects. Just over four per cent of India's land mass is currently set aside for wildlife and nature protection. By using the other 96 per cent efficiently, we should be able to protect the forests in which tigers and other wildlife need to survive.

#### Tiger Facts

- 🐾 India's tiger population was believed to be less than 2,000 in the early seventies.
- 🐾 In 1972, tiger hunting was banned and the *Wildlife (Protection) Act* was passed.
- 🐾 In 1973, Project Tiger came to the rescue of *Panthera tigris*.
- 🐾 Nine forests were nominated as Project Tiger Reserves to help save the species.
- 🐾 To save these majestic Indian cats, Project Tiger chose habitat protection as its main strategy. The tiger was thus protected and the first sign of the renewal of its habitat was that once-dry water sources came to life.
- 🐾 In 1975, CITES came into effect. Commercial international trade in tigers, tiger parts and derivatives is prohibited among signatory countries.
- 🐾 In 1981, China joined CITES but did not ban trade in tiger derivatives.
- 🐾 In 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated. This marked a decline in political support for the tiger.
- 🐾 In 1989, the all-India tiger census enumerated 4,334 tigers.

## The Tiger, *Panthera tigris*

- 🐾 In 1993, the census reported a drop in tiger numbers to about 3,750.
- 🐾 In 1995, after sustained pressure by activists, politicians and bureaucrats were forced to admit that the tiger was in danger of extinction once again.
- 🐾 2001: It is well known that we continue to lose about a tiger a day as a result of poaching and habitat destruction. The current tiger population is around 2,000.

### Why save the tiger?

The tiger is a beautiful animal. But that is not the reason why we are asking for it to be saved. When we save the tiger, we save the forest it lives in and, in turn, our water sources. For tigers to live, we have to make sure that deer and all other animals that the tiger eats also survive. This can only be done by protecting the trees, grasses and plants that these animals eat. In this way, the whole forest together with insects, birds and animals gets saved!

*By saving tiger forests, we protect the catchment areas of our rivers and recharge groundwater sources. There is a very direct link between saving tigers and saving ourselves. The tiger thus becomes a symbol for the protection of a biodiversity that is the foundation of sustainability and quality of human life on the Indian subcontinent.*

### Activities based on Lesson Plan on *Panthera tigris*

- ◆ Distribute Petition Sheets on which children will obtain signatures in support of the tiger from neighbours and friends.
- ◆ Children should explain the rationale: To save the tiger, the forest must be saved... this saves our rivers... which means we save ourselves.
- ◆ Make tiger cut-outs and masks.
- ◆ Make a life-sized tiger from recycled material.
- ◆ A tiger picture occupies the centre of the class web as an indicator.