

A Natural Place To Be



A National Historic Site

# Bengal Tigers (Panthera tigris)

**Family:** Felidae **Order:** Carnivora **Species:** Tigris

**Range:** Bengal Tigers are usually located on the Mainland of Southeastern Asia and in central and southern India. Tigers can live in almost any climate. They need only shade, water and prey. They are found in the hot rain forest of Malaya, the dark thorny woods of India, and the cold, snowy, spruce forest of Manchuria. They also live in oak woods, tall grassland, swamps, and marshes. Tigers prefer to be in shadows and seldom go into open country.

**Diet:** Bengal Tigers are carnivorous. They prefer deer, young buffalo, young elephants, goat and wild boar. Since Bengal Tigers are capable of consuming as much as 40 pounds of meat at a time, a tiger may not eat for several days.

**Status:** At the beginning of the 19th Century there were about 100,000 tigers in the world with eight separate sub-species. Today tigers are an endangered species. It is estimated the world population of tigers is less than 5000 in the wild with only five remaining sub-species (Bengal, Siberian, South China, Indochinese, and Sumatran). Over the past one hundred years, there have only been a dozen or so reports of White Bengal Tigers being seen in the wild. White Bengal Tigers are a rare and endangered animal that can only be born when both parents carry the recessive gene for white colouring, occurring naturally only about once in every 10,000 births. They are not albinos and they are not a separate subspecies of tigers. They have blue eyes, a pink nose, and creamy white fur covered with chocolate colored stripes.

**Physical Characteristics:** Tigers are the largest living cats. The black stripes on the tawny coat provide effective camouflage in the tiger's forest habitat. Background colour ranges from white to deep fawn

in Bengal. Tiger stripes are like human fingerprints; no two tigers have the same pattern of stripes. The Bengal Tiger is about 3 meters long, and weighs approximately 180-285 kg (400-569 LB). At full running speed they reach up to 60 kilometers per hour.

**Behaviour:** Bengal Tigers are very patient, watching their prey and waiting until the right time to make their move. Bengal Tigers have a strong sense of smell and impressive night vision (six times better than that of humans). Bengal Tigers can also swim and move quite swiftly in the water. Tigers are only one of two species of cats that like water (the other species being the Jaguar). Bengal Tigers have the ability to shed or grow body hair according to climate temperatures. They do not possess great stamina and are poor climbers. The average tiger sleeps between 16 to 18 hours per day.

Unlike lions, who live in social groups, tigers are basically solitary. The male and female only come together at mating season, when sharing a kill, or when sharing the same watering holes. Litters range from one to six cubs, which stay with their mother until their second year. Tiger cubs are born blind and weigh only about 2 to 3 pounds. They live on milk for 6-8 weeks before the female begins taking them to feed on kills. Tigers have fully developed canines by 16 months of age, but they do not begin making their own kills until about 18 months of age. At two to three years of age, the cubs establish their own territories. Daughters tend to settle near their mother, sons disperse over greater distances.

