

ALTA Conservation Report

September 2004

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1. ALTA meeting in Moscow (Sharon)
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Documents on internet

The latest [Amur leopard conservation update](#) is now available on the Tigris Foundation website www.tigrisfoundation.nl .

Previous [ALTA reports](#) and documents about the following topics can also be downloaded (go to [updates & reports](#)):

- a recent social survey in forest settlements in Amur leopard habitat ([Social Survey Leopard Range](#))
 - Michiel Hötte's conservation activities in the first half of 2004 ([Conservation report Aug 2004](#))
 - the impact of forest fires on leopards and their habitat ([A. leopard range fire analysis](#))
 - first "Tiger Tour" planned for April 2005 ([Tiger Tour](#))
 - tiny radio collars fitted on youngest-ever tiger cubs ([Tiger Cubs get radio-collar - WCS](#))
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1. ALTA meeting in Moscow

A meeting of representatives of ALTA is being organised in Moscow at the end of October to consider future conservation activities for the Amur tiger and leopard. It is hoped that during the meeting Russian and international experts from ALTA will brief members of the Russian Parliament, representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and of the Regional Primorski Government.

2. Moscow-UK lobby and promotion activities

Representatives of the ALTA group met with the deputy Minister for Natural Resources in the autumn of 2003 and were pleased to develop a stronger relationship not only with the Minister but with other



ministry representatives. However, unfortunately, due to a Cabinet reshuffle in early 2004 and other changes in Ministry Administrations, both of the Deputy Ministers that ALTA had built strong links were replaced. In addition a new Minister was appointed. So with a new management team at the Ministry ALTA has to start again this autumn in establishing relationships with the new team.

In May 2004 AMUR organised a team to run in the Moscow Half Marathon with over 100 runners in the team. As a result of the large team there was a

huge amount of press interest. A number of articles were covered on Russian TV, Radio and in newspapers.

PR in Moscow has been good in 2004 – with articles in newspapers and magazines including some articles in very prestigious magazines.

ZSL and AMUR held a joint lunch for corporates in London hosted by Moscow Narodny Bank. Over 50 people attended this lunch including several prominent businessmen. An interview with Sharon Miller and Sarah Christie was aired on the BBC and an Anglo Russian business journal carried a 3 page article.

The autumn of 2004 has a number of awareness raising events planned including Russian Amur Tiger and Leopard Day on September 26th, a presentation to the AZA conference in September, a Gala evening in London in October and an art exhibition in Moscow in November.

3. Closer working arrangements for AMUR, ZSL and Tigris

AMUR, ZSL and Tigris have formed a partnership to make all three organisations more efficient. ZSL is now responsible for administration of all funds, which enables Sharon Miller and Michiel Hötte to concentrate more on their respective work areas. Michiel is now a ZSL employee as well as Director of Tigris and is spending most of his time in the Russian Far East, acting as ALTA Coordinator, designing field projects, liaising with other relevant groups, and collecting information on the current situation. Sharon is concentrating on public relations, political lobbying in Moscow, event organising and fundraising in Russia and the UK.

4. Regional sub-programme for Amur tigers and leopards in zoos in Russia and surrounding countries

Recently, the Eurasian Regional Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EARAZA) became concerned that the smaller zoos in their region (Russia and surrounding countries) were not involved in the EEP breeding programmes for leopards and tigers, though the larger ones are. So in order to improve breeding management of these big cats and hence contribute to the overall conservation support from zoos, it was decided that EARAZA member zoos that have Amur tigers and/or Amur leopards in their collections should join regional subprogramms for these two subspecies under the overall banner of the Amur tiger and Amur leopard EEPs. Tanya Arzhonova of Moscow Zoo is now regional co-ordinator for both taxa and will work closely with EEP coordinator Sarah Christie (Sarah and Tanya were already joint Coordinators for the Amur leopard EEP and this will continue). The new programme members - the smaller regional zoos - have been advised on the rules of EEP programs, including those pertaining to the obligations of the participants, and Tanya is currently collecting data from them. Analysis will still be done at ZSL in consultation with Tanya, who will act as liaison point. To some extent, the EARAZA population will be managed as a separate unit. This important decision is

expected to result in a significant improvement in the management and breeding of Amur tigers and Amur leopards in the zoos of Russia and other countries of the region.

5. Zoo support for Amur leopards

A programme designed to increase support for Amur leopards from zoos in Europe, Russia and North America is being put into place by ZSL, Moscow Zoo, AMUR and Tigris. ZSL is coordinating production of a leopard CD containing pictures, maps and information which will assist zoos in producing educational graphics and fundraising materials. Four projects, chosen by a review panel, will be selected for support; these are likely to cover antipoaching, fire-fighting, ecological research, habitat protection and public awareness. As is done for the successful "Eaza Tiger Campaign" currently under way, participating zoos will receive regular reports and new pictures, possibly also digital video footage, from the field. These materials will be distributed by ZSL, and a website download facility will also be arranged for this information. In Russia and surrounding countries, the programme will focus mainly on education and awareness and the first point of contact will be Tanya Arzhanova of Moscow Zoo. In North America, PMP Coordinator Chris Pfefferkorn of Oregon Zoo will coordinate zoo activities and forward collected funds to ZSL. The CD will be distributed by the end of September 2004, to coincide with the annual "Tiger and Leopard Day" festival in the Russian Far East.

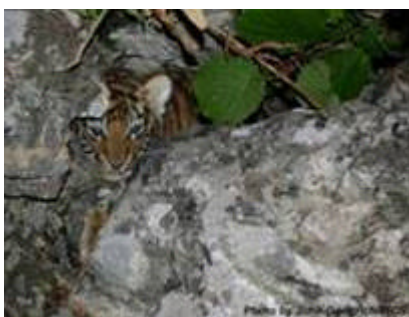
6. Oil pipeline continues to be a threat to leopards

The continuously changing plans for oil pipelines illustrate the unpredictability of Russian politics. Several plans have been developed for transport and export of oil produced in central Siberia. Until recently, the development of a pipeline to China seemed almost certain; the Chinese were willing to make large investments and the plans were in an advanced stage. A second plan emerged more than a year ago, for a pipeline eastwards from the point where the route to China went south. The eastward route would transport oil to the coast of the Japanese Sea in Primorski Krai from where it would be transported by tankers to Japan and South Korea. However, according to Moscow sources the plan for an eastward route was abandoned several months ago, because it was expected that the oil production in Siberia would not suffice to feed both a route into China and to the Japanese Sea. Recently, however, the plan for a route to China was abandoned and it seems only a pipeline to the Japanese Sea will be built. There are strategic political advantages to transporting oil to the Japanese Sea. Russia fears that China's fast economic growth and large population will make China more and more dominant in the region. Russia is reluctant to contribute to this process and prefers not to become dependent on Chinese oil imports. Once oil has reached the Japanese Sea, it can be exported to many destinations, including China, Japan and Korea. This flexibility is a considerable advantage.

Both Nakhodka (a harbour north of Vladivostok) and Buxta Perevoza in the Amur leopard range are mentioned as final destinations of a route to the Japanese Sea. The Primorski Krai (provincial) administration strongly favours a route to the leopard area, probably because it has relatively weak links with local business in Nakhodka.

In July scientist and conservationists participated in a public hearing in the "White House" of the provincial administration. As many as twenty short presentations by scientists and conservationists highlighted the various disastrous ecological effects of a pipeline through the leopard range, which is probably Russia's most biodiverse region and home to 31% of Russia's Red Book land species. If the pipeline goes through leopard habitat an oil terminal has to be built in the Amur Bay, close to Vladivostok, the main tourist resorts in the province and Russia's only marine reserve. It is still uncertain if the opposition will result in a different route.

7. Tiny collars fitted on youngest-ever tiger cubs (from a press release by John Goodrich)



Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and their Russian colleagues from the Sikhote-Alin Reserve have fitted three wild Siberian tiger cubs under six weeks old with tiny radio-collars, marking the youngest wild tigers to be tracked by scientists. The collars--made with elastic designed to expand and eventually break and fall off of the growing cubs--weigh just over five ounces and would fit well on a large house cat. These devices will give researchers crucial insights into the lives of tiger cubs in the Russian Far East and ways of improving the survival and reproduction of the largest of the cat species.

"Through radio telemetry, we've learned the needs of Siberian tigers, animals so elusive that few field researchers have seen them in their natural habitat," said John Goodrich, a WCS researcher and the head of the Siberian Tiger Project. "Now we can finally get some idea of what causes the deaths of tiger cubs, 50 percent in their first year; if we can somehow improve their chances, helping the population to grow."

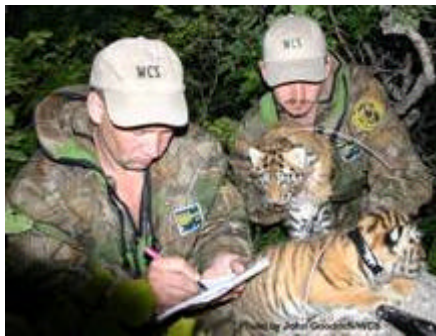


learned a great deal about the elusive that few field researchers habitat," said John Goodrich, a Siberian Tiger Project. "Now we causes the deaths of tiger cubs, 50 percent in their first year; if we we can make a big difference in

Working near the Sikhote-Alin located the den by tracking a radio-Galia. Of course, finding the cubs in making sure Mom was not home. Galia's radio signal indicated that she searching for the cubs, which they found in a collection of rocks on the slope of a hill. The cubs, who weighed from 6.5 to nine pounds, remained calm as the researchers handled and measured them. After collecting hair and blood samples for genetic and disease analysis, Goodrich and his team fitted them with radio collars and returned them to their den.

Zapovednik, the researchers collared 3-year-old tigress named required some caution, particularly The researchers waited until had left the den site before

The cubs represent the third generation of radio-collared tigers for the project, which has been monitoring the cats in the Russian Far East for the past decade. The mother of the cubs-an animal named Galia by Goodrich and his colleagues-was captured and radio-collared in the autumn of 2002. The cubs' grandmother Lidia was fitted with a collar back in October, 1999.



Provided by WCS researcher Toni Ruth, who has used the devices for years for tracking mountain lion kittens in the Greater Yellowstone area, the collars will enable researchers to follow the tiger cubs until the collars fall off or the cubs themselves die. The transmitters emit a "mortality" signal if the unit remains stationary for more than one hour. Finding the animal quickly is crucial in ascertaining the cause of death.

WCS is the only conservation organization that studies tigers in every country where these cats occur.
High Resolution Photos Available

8. "Tiger Tour"

In April 2005 a first exploratory eco-tour to the range of the Amur tiger is planned. The tour has been developed by Steppes Travel and AMUR in co-operation with a local Russian tour operator, Nikolai Kazakov of WCS and Michiel Hötte of Tigris. The main focus of the trip is the Amur tiger, but it will also take in other wildlife, indigenous people, and an exploration of the fantastic countryside. As part of the trip, tourists will visit two reserves in tiger habitat and have an opportunity to meet Russian specialists and WCS staff involved in tiger conservation. Part of the income generated by the trip will be used to support the reserves and conservation projects. A document describing the tour can be downloaded from the Tigris website www.tigrisfoundation.nl (go to "News" on the homepage). For further information and bookings, please contact Tim Seaton at Steppes Travel on +7(095)2906149 or by e-mail to tim@steppestravel.ru.

9. Tiger poaching and conflict cases

There are indications that tiger poaching and human-tiger conflicts are on the rise. On June 17th a man collecting forest products was attacked and killed by a male tiger in Khabarovsk Krai. Two other people, who were collecting forest products nearby, saw the tiger. When they heard the victim's scream, they hurried to the nearest villages for help. A limping tiger was found and shot close to the remains of the victim. Investigation of the tiger's body showed that it had been suffering from a bullet wound injury in the left front paw. In addition the tiger had lost sight in one of its eyes as a result of an older bullet wound.

On the night of 23 May 2004 a group of at least 3 poachers went out on a hunting trip in the Amur leopard range behind the border fence erected about 8–12 kilometres from the Chinese border.

Investigations by the Inspection Tiger team led by Andrei Yurchenko suggest that the poachers hunted at night from a tractor using torches. Animals caught in the light stop moving, allowing a relatively easy shot. The hunters usually only see the reflection of the eyes and in this case a hunter happened to shoot at a full-grown, male tiger. The wounded tiger charged and inflicted mortal injuries to one of the hunters before his companions managed to kill it. The wounded poacher was brought to a nearby hospital and later transported to Vladivostok where he succumbed to wounds inflicted by dogs according to the hospital documents. The anti-poaching team wanted to investigate the incident after an anonymous tip, but was refused access to the border zone by the commander. Fortunately, Andrei found tracks of a tractor leading from the border fence to a spot outside the border zone where the tiger was buried. The case shows that corruption is still a considerable problem in this part of Russia.

On May 8 a tiger was found in Lazov reserve and on May 14 a man working for Sikhote Alin reserve was attacked and injured by a tiger. The man survived, but the tiger was killed.

A tiger has been killing deer at a deer farm in the leopard range for several months. The tiger also killed 2 horses. Inspection Tiger received permission to catch the tiger, but attempts have so far been unsuccessful. Tigris and Phoenix have paid more than \$2000 compensations for the livestock killed by this tiger alone.

10. Fire impact analysis and new fire fighting approaches in leopard range

WCS, TIGIS and Tigris Foundation recently conducted a thorough analysis of fires in SW Primorye. For six of the eight years between 1996 to 2003 where suitable satellite imagery was available, the GIS laboratory TIGIS determined the extent of burning.

This analysis revealed that a total of 46% (!) of SW Primorye burned at least once during the six years for which good images are available. Most fires are ground fires that seldom kill large overstory trees directly, but frequent fires prevent understory trees from growing, creating a "park-like" forest with a mature overstory, but only grasses and herbaceous plants in the understory. With no replacement, forestland is slowly converted to grassland. Once meadows and shrublands are created, fires prevent recovery into forest stands.

Analyses of tiger and leopard habitat preferences have clearly demonstrated that both prefer mature forest types, and avoid open grasslands and areas that suffer regular burning.

The fire analysis report can be downloaded from the Tigris site www.tigrisfoundation.nl (Go to reports and updates).

We conducted a survey among the local population in SW Primorye to determine more precisely who sets fires and why, and to determine public opinion towards fires. Almost all local citizens consider fires a large problem and suggest severe punishments for those who start them (in reality no prosecution of arsonists takes place at present). Based on the results of the public survey, we will initiate an education and mass media campaign to increase public awareness and reduce the number of fires that are started.

We hope to improve fire-fighting capacity in the region by improving co-operation between Forest Service, Hunting Department, border guards, hunting lease managers, deer farms and district officials. Development of a strategic approach to fire fighting that increases effectiveness of efforts will be vital. We will enlist assistance of local administrations, police and judicial branches to arrest and prosecute arsonists.

Dale Miquelle of WCS made arrangements to have the leopard range in SW Primorye included as a priority area in a US \$8,000,000 World Bank project for improved fire control in the present and former Amur tiger habitat in the Russian Far East.

We initiated intensive fire suppression efforts in a fire control "model area". In the spring of 2004 our 5-member fire fighting team reduced the burns in a 110 km² model area by more than 65%! We are now designing a system of firebreaks that we hope will reduce burns sufficiently so that we can start with forest restoration activities. We hope our work will demonstrate that it is possible to restore healthy forests.

11. Amur leopard conservation

During a recent meeting of the Leopard Steering Committee it was decided that an advisory "large predator" committee, mainly for Amur leopard and tiger conservation, should be created under GUPR, the local committee of the Ministry of Natural Resources. An official request to form such a committee consisting of local experts will be developed. In practice the formation of the committee would mean that the present International Leopard Steering Committee, that includes international members, will be dissolved.

During the 2003/2004 winter season the WCS and the Institute for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources carried out a second Amur leopard camera-trapping survey in Southwest Primorye. Although the area covered was smaller than during the previous survey, the results were very encouraging; a total of 13 different individual leopards appeared on the photographs, whereas only 10 different individuals were identified in the same area the previous year. Eight of the leopards photographed last year in the area were "recaptured" this year. The results indicate that leopard numbers may have increased within the study area, but it is also possible that the difference is associated with sampling variability (e.g. it may be related to a change in travel patterns associated with snow depth). Perhaps the most important result is evidence that recruitment and "turnover" is occurring within the population, whereas previously it was feared that reproduction may have been extremely rare.

On March 20th 2004 the Inspection Tiger anti-poaching team operating SW Primorye in the last refuge of the remaining 30 Amur leopards, purchased a German shepherd dog. Nadezjda ("Hope"), aged three, is the first dog to assist in anti-poaching efforts in the Amur tiger and leopard ranges. Nadezjda has worked with the police force and was initially trained to track down people, but later made a "career change" and searched for narcotics. Nadezjda's new master, a former border guard, has trained dogs and worked with them for 6 years in SW Primorye. His experience as a border guard will be a tremendous asset in our fight against poachers in and around the border zone. We expected it would take 6 months to prepare Nadezjda for anti-poaching work, but within a month she was ready and joined the anti-poaching team on their patrols in the forest. On April 28th she "caught" her first two poachers who had killed a roe deer inside a protected area.

WWF has developed a high-quality conservation 'commercial' that is frequently shown on local television in the Primorski Krai. The commercial shows a woman with a young child being hunted by a man with a gun. An Amur leopard appears in view and comments that the scene is familiar to him. A voice-over then mentions that only 30 Amur leopards remain and calls on the viewers to support WWF who is doing everything it can to protect the Amur leopard (a Moscow telephone number is provided). The commercial is very professionally executed.

12. Conservation activities in China

WCS China recently had a social survey conducted in villages inside and near the Hunchun tiger and leopard reserve as part of conservation activities for which 21st Century Tiger provided support. The survey provided a number of striking results. The overall conclusion is that still a lot of work needs to be done to improve the attitude of the local villagers towards the reserve and the large cats that inhabit it. In various villages between 62% and 73% of people that participated agreed with a statement that tigers and leopards need to be protected so that our children can still see them. But at the same time a majority (51%-56%) states not to be proud *at all* of living in a reserve with tigers and leopards. 75% fully agrees with a statement that the reserve was established without considering the interest of local people, and 49%-54% (strongly) agrees with the suggestion to abolish the reserve, while only 24%-25% (strongly) disagrees.

Villager receives a livestock kill compensation payment



We hope that compensation payments for livestock kills and education projects will help to improve the attitude of local people. Since the establishment of the reserve in 2001 a total of 43 livestock kills (horses, mules and cows) were recorded and all of them have been attributed to tigers. WCS assisted in the design of a compensation scheme and the reserve recently started to pay substantial compensations to the owners of the livestock that has been killed with funds provided by 21st Century Tiger. We expect the funds will suffice to pay compensations during 18 months after which we hope local authorities will make funds available to continue the compensation scheme.

The survey will be repeated at least once every two years to measure changes in the attitude and opinions of the local population.

13. Full range tiger survey

Tentative plans for a full range survey of tigers are being made in the Russian Far East. When last surveyed in the winter of 1995-1996, there were an estimated 331-370 adult Amur tigers in the Russian Far East. Since then, yearly monitoring suggests that there has been a slight downward trend in numbers, particularly over the past 3 years. A complete survey is necessary to define whether a decline has actually occurred, and if so, to what extent have numbers declined. Plans are underway to estimate prey abundance across the range of Amur tigers in conjunction with the tiger survey. Preliminary meetings in both Khabarovsk and Primorye have indicated strong political support for conducting such a survey, even though the cost is high. Support from the international conservation community will be essential if the survey is to proceed.