

Last roar for Tanintharyi Tigers?

Fauna & Flora International and the Myanmar Forest Department have launched a new initiative to help protect this iconic species from extinction.

A workshop in Myeik Town on 26 May brought together government and non-government groups, local communities and the business sector to identify priorities for the conservation of tigers¹ in the far south of Myanmar.

Tigers are on the brink of extinction in the wild, and the forests of southern Tanintharyi are one of the last refuges for this charismatic species in the country. However, they are now at a critical crossroads and face numerous threats to their continued survival – principally the conversion of forest to oil palm and other crops, wildlife trade, and hunting of prey.

Tigers were once widespread in Myanmar, to the point that they were considered a serious risk to rural travellers in the 1800s, even close to Rangoon (or Yangon, as it is known today). Today, however, the situation is very different. Current estimates for the global population of wild tigers are hindered by a lack of systematic data, but recent official estimates put numbers at no more than 3,200 left in the wild, scattered across 14 range countries and states².

While at one time tigers may have been at risk from reprisal killings from villagers defending their livestock or families, today hunting is mostly driven by the illegal wildlife trade – a multi-million dollar industry fuelled by demand for meat, medicines, skins and other tiger products.

“There are strong links globally between wildlife crime and other organised criminal activities such as drug and human trafficking, and the theft of Myanmar’s natural and cultural heritage by organised gangs should clearly be a national security concern as well as a global conservation one,” said Mark Grindley, Tanintharyi Programme Manager at Fauna & Flora International (FFI). Mr Grindley also said that over the past two years FFI has had multiple encounters with Thai four-wheel-drive enthusiast groups making illegal incursions into the forests of southern Tanintharyi for off-road driving and hunting.

The workshop, which was jointly hosted by FFI and the Myanmar Forest Department, was also attended by an informal delegation of government conservation officers from Thailand, who shared some of their own experiences of combating illegal wildlife trade.

They took the opportunity to promote a model of public-private partnership known as the “POWER Network”³ from just over the border in Thailand’s Prachuap Kirikhan Province, which brings many government and private bodies together to work towards sustainable management of watersheds and community-based wildlife tourism in Kuiburi National Park (which directly borders Tanintharyi Region). Their attendance was facilitated by WWF Thailand, which is also collaborating on the new initiative.

During the workshop, attendees also heard about recent survey results on the biodiversity values of the southern Tanintharyi forests, presented by FFI; the national tiger strategy by the Forest Department; a wildlife consumption survey conducted recently by three student groups from Myeik University; the results of village-based camera trapping by a Karen community near the Ngawun Reserve Forest; and an introduction to community-based conservation in the Kamonthwe area east of Dawei by a local community leader.

In his concluding remarks, Mr Grindley noted: “The government of Myanmar, international and local NGOs, and many local groups and community members have shown through their actions and their attendance here today that they will no longer stand by as this noble and iconic species becomes extinct.”

“They have also shown a desire to work together to find solutions to this impending disaster,” he said, referring to a straw poll that indicated the majority of attendees supported forming a multi-stakeholder group in the POWER Network mould to encourage cooperation.

“Only through joint efforts can we realistically hope to put an end to the decimation of the world’s tigers, and FFI stands alongside all those who are willing to join to the fight,” Mr Grindley added.

The workshop was part of a new initiative funded by the German KfW Development Bank, through the Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Project⁴ that is managed globally by IUCN⁵. The Tanintharyi Tiger Project will run for an initial three years and aims to establish and support tiger and prey monitoring, community patrolling, improved law enforcement, support for village forest management, ecotourism pilots, and improved cooperation with Thailand. FFI also called recently for a moratorium on further [expansion of oil palm plantations](#) and associated forest clearance, which will be the subject of an upcoming workshop with the Department of Agriculture as part of the government’s 100 day plan.

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For further information (including high resolution images), please contact:

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Notes to editors:

1. Myanmar is home to a small population of the Indochinese tiger (*Panthera tigris* ssp. *corbetti*).
2. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/15955/0>

3. POWER stands for Public Private Partnership offering for Wildlife and Ecosystem Resilience, and is focused on the protected and collaborative management of Kuiburi National Park in Prachuap Kirikhan Province. It is an initiative of the Thailand Department of National Parks, WWF Thailand and several other agencies.

See here for more information: http://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?209788/Thai-PM-visits-Kuiburi-National-Park

4. https://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/our_work/tiger_conservation/
5. International Union for Conservation of Nature <http://www.iucn.org/>

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.