

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **For immediate release**

#### **New survey gives hope to the Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger**

Reports that tiger populations are declining in many parts of its range paint a bleak and all too familiar picture. Of the 13 tiger range countries recognised today, the Indonesian archipelago has already lost two distinct tiger subspecies from the islands of Bali and Java. However a new study, [published in the scientific journal PLoS ONE](#), provides a rare glimmer of hope for Indonesia's last subspecies, the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*).

Reliably determining where tigers are present within dense tropical jungle is challenging because their secretive behaviour and excellent camouflage make them difficult to detect. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Sumatran tiger's current status, eight NGOs have joined forces with the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry for the past three years to carry out the first ever Sumatra-wide survey.

Lead author Hariyo Wibisono of the Wildlife Conservation Society and Chairman of the Sumatran Tiger Forum (*HarimauKita*), which coordinated the initiative, said, "This survey is a milestone for Sumatran tigers. The results provide the most up-to-date and reliable information ever collected for this Critically Endangered subspecies and is the first time that such a large number of organisations have worked together so effectively."

Over 13,500km of forest transects were surveyed for indirect signs of tigers and their prey, an impressive feat given that the entire length of Sumatra is only 1,900km. Scientists measured the tiger's spatial distribution within 394 sampling grid cells (of 17 x 17km). The study found that while over 70% of forest patches surveyed were occupied by tigers, its status varied greatly between the different landscapes.

Speaking about the newly created 3.3 million hectare Leuser-Ulu Masen landscape in Aceh Province, co-author Dr Matthew Linkie from Fauna & Flora International explained, "This study puts Aceh's previously unsurveyed forest firmly on the map as a global priority for wild tigers in Asia."

Another positive finding was the wide distribution of tigers found in the second largest landscape: the 1.6 million hectare Kerinci Seblat-Batang Hari. The size of the area, combined with a decade of Tiger Protection and Conservation Unit forest patrols there, have shown how resilient tigers can be under the right conditions.

The survey results from Riau Province did, however, provide a sobering example of the impact of deforestation, with tigers generally missing from severely degraded forest patches. Dr Sunarto, who led the World Wildlife Fund team there, warned of the perilous situation facing Sumatran tigers: "Over the past 25 years, Riau has lost 65% of its natural forest, so it's unsurprising that tigers are badly affected here. However, they are still roaming and breeding in some areas and we're increasing our conservation efforts in these areas and trying to restore forest corridors between tiger subpopulations."

The participating NGOs and their government partners will use this new-found information to enhance their management strategies (such as law enforcement patrolling) in priority areas, as well as working towards increasing tiger populations in degraded areas.

Looking to the future, co-author Dr Joseph Smith of Panthera explained, “The survey results provide an excellent benchmark against which to measure how our future conservation efforts are benefiting tigers on the ground.”

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#### Notes to the Editor:

- Tiger landscapes can cover more than one protected area and are used by the international tiger community to prioritise their conservation efforts based on the habitat quality and the estimated number of resident tigers.
- In 2007, government agencies and NGOs met to discuss conservation of the remaining Sumatran tigers. This led to the development and launch of a National Action Plan, which aims to double the number of wild Sumatran tigers by 2022. The action plan mandated a nationwide survey of Sumatran tiger populations, to assess the current situation, identify the key threats and determine the conservation actions needed.
- The nine organisations directly involved in the surveys are: the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Fauna & Flora International (FFI), Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE)/University of Kent, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Sumatran Tiger Conservation and Protection, Leuser International Foundation (LIF), and Rhino Foundation of Indonesia.
- *HarimauKita*, the Sumatran Tiger Conservation Forum ([www.harimaukita.org](http://www.harimaukita.org)), is a civil society group supported by 105 members from 25 conservation organisations, government institutions, and community members. *HarimauKita* organised and managed the survey.

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