



TIGER

TIGER or BABR The little evidence remaining suggests no more than tentative differences between the Caspian tiger (*Panthera tigris virgata*) and that of either the Indian tiger (*P. t. tigris*) or the Siberian tiger (*P. t. altaica*). Skins and photographs would suggest that it was of intermediate size. The stripes have been reported as not as wide, and more brownish on the sides. The Caspian tiger has been noted for its long winter coat. Little is known regarding the biology of the Caspian tiger. It was reported to reproduce once every 2 to 3 years, bearing 2 to 4 cubs per litter. No particular breeding season has been documented. In the Ili River Valley in Kazakhstan, tiger territories measured 20 by 50 km, while a male and two females were thought to have occupied an area measuring only 6 by 7 km. Their territories partially overlapped. In former times the Caspian tiger's range was extensive, ranging westward to the mountains of Ararat and the Caucasus and as far eastward as the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash in Russian Kazakhstan. Material collected near Bagrash Kul in Chinese Turkestan may also belong to this race. At the beginning of the century the tiger was still found in Armenia, and one specimen was captured in Tiflis. In Iran it was formerly distributed throughout the moist Caspian region, inhabiting the reed-covered coastal plain and the forests on the northern slopes of the Alborz mountains in Gilān, Māzandarān and western Khorasan provinces. Unlike the wild boar, its principal wild prey species, it was never recorded on the southern, drier slopes of the Alborz mountains. Clearing of the Caspian lowland forests and marshes for agricultural use along with direct persecution eliminated the tiger from these areas, the last of which were recorded in the remaining fragment of reed stands in the Southeast



Caspian region, where they were poisoned because of reputed depredations on livestock. Increased hunting by military squads and the replacement of dense forests with cotton fields resulted in their decline in the Turkmenia region. Burning of the dense reed thickets in the river valleys in Kazakhstan is thought to have brought about its demise in Central Asia.

Between 1973 and 1976 extensive efforts were made by the biologists of the Iranian Department of Environment to determine if tigers remained in the forests of the Alborz Mountains. Casts of cat pug marks were collected throughout the region each winter. Almost all were easily identified as leopard. However in two of the more isolated areas the casts were sufficiently large as to be suggestive of tiger. A dozen bait stations with remote cameras were established in both regions over a two-winter period. Wolves, bears, innumerable leopards, and a host of other predators were recorded, but no tiger. Some unusually large cat tracks in partially melted snow conditions in conjunction with leopard photographs led to the conclusion that the original casts were those of leopard. Closer examination of the original casts also revealed that they were recorded while the animal or animals were descending down snow-covered slopes, at which time the toes were widely splayed, thus adding to their size. Why the tiger did not continue to survive in the more isolated forested mountain areas can only be conjectured. Perhaps it existed as a population in the mountains in former times only as a temporary surplus from the adjoining Caspian lowland. While prey in the form of wild boar were abundant in the mountains, so too were leopards, which may have served as more efficient predators under these conditions. This coupled with a combination of loss of the lowland population of tigers along with a modicum of direct persecution through hunting and poisoning may have reduced the mountain tiger population to a level that was incapable of surviving. Once the tiger's decline had become well recognized, laws were enacted both in Iran and

the USSR giving it total protection. However, such actions did not come soon enough to save it in the wild. Apart from a Caspian tiger reportedly breeding and producing young twice in the Moscow Zoo over a two-year period, no effort was made to develop a captive breeding program, which might also have saved it from extinction. The last reliable report of a Caspian tiger was in 1958 within the forested mountain area of the former Moḥammad Reżā Shah National Park in northeastern Iran.



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