

Tigers On The Prowl

by Despina Rosales

The Cat Of Cats

The tiger is not just any cat, it is the biggest cat in the whole wide world. The largest of males can grow to be around four metres long and weigh up to 300 kilos. Phew! That's one BIG cat! Imagine your pet cat suddenly grew to that size – you'd need to buy a seriously *huge* kitty litter box.

A Cat With Duck Feet

If you ever see a tiger in your school playground, be sure to challenge it to a climbing competition. You'd definitely win, because tigers are not good climbers. But don't think you can defeat a tiger in the school pool, because not even Ian Thorpe could beat this cat in the water. Tigers are *excellent* swimmers.

Now a tiger doesn't really have duck feet. But, just like a duck, it does have webbing between its toes, which it can spread to help it swim very quickly. And although a tiger is officially a cat, it swims using the doggie paddle.

Unlike most felines, tigers actually *like* the water. So a tiger tracking prey wouldn't hesitate crossing a river to go after its dinner. And just like you would jump into your grandma's swimming pool in summer, this cat will go for a paddle to cool itself down on a hot day too.

Undercover Tiger

If you tried to tiptoe out of your room while you're supposed to be doing homework, you'd probably get caught. That's because you're not dressed like a tiger.

You see, a tiger can quite easily sneak about unnoticed. This is because of its stripes. They break up the animal's shape, helping it blend with the shadows cast by the trees.

But in your case, as your house contains furniture rather than trees, a fully striped body suit is not the answer.

Maybe you could dress like a couch, or a lamp, or even a refrigerator. That should do the trick – your parents would *never* suspect that the piece of furniture moving across the room could be you, and you'll slink away quite easily!

Taking The Leap

Tigers don't chase their prey like cheetahs do. They stalk, just like Lions (except alone, not in a pride) using their natural camouflage to move unobserved through even the lowest cover.

This cat creeps silently, closer and closer to the unwary animal. When near enough, the tiger springs, taking its victim by surprise.

For smaller animals (like wild pigs), a tiger will leap from the front, gripping the creature with its beefy forelimbs and pulling it to the ground. A bite through the nape of the neck fractures the animal's vertebrae and compresses the spinal cord, killing it quickly.

For larger animals (like buffalos), the tiger will attack from behind, diving onto its victim's back. It grabs the beast's neck with its front legs and claws, and throws it to the ground. Usually this will break the animal's neck. But if that doesn't happen, the tiger will suffocate it with a clamping bite to the throat.

Regardless of which angle it chooses to strike from, a tiger's hind legs are so powerful that its leap can cover over ten metres. Here's an experiment: round up twenty teachers and get them to lie side by side on the ground. Then you and your classmates line up and, going one at a time, try to hurdle the lot of them.

Whoever makes it from the first to the last teacher without stepping on any teacher in between has the leaping power of a tiger, and should join the Australian Olympic Long jump Team *immediately*.

The Meal Begins

A tiger's jaw strength actually allows it to drag or carry an animal so heavy that it would require 13 adult men to move it. Tigers don't have ovens, so they haul their kill to a heavily screened area and it eat raw, starting from the legs and working their way up to the head of the animal.

If undisturbed, a tiger will return to the carcass for up to a week, feeding until it has completely consumed its kill. Even if their food goes rotten and the dead animal putrefies, the tiger continues eating.

A tiger usually has around ten kilos of meat for a meal, but it can eat up to 45 kilos of meat in one go. Talk about a BIG cat with a BIG appetite!

Cat Stats

- Scientific name – *Panthera tigris*
- Kingdom – Animalia (which means it's not a plant or a mineral)
- Class – Mammalia (it has warm blood)
- Order – Carnivora (it only eats meat)
- Family – Felidae (it's a cat)

Close To Extinction

Where Can I Find A Tiger?

Although it prefers to live in forest or jungle, tigers have been known to live in swamps, reeds, grasses, caves, and even old buildings when they have no other choice.

But no matter where a tiger makes its home, all tigers live in Asia, or on the islands of the Asian continent. (And if you're wondering about the Tasmanian Tiger from Australia, it's not really a tiger – it's an extinct marsupial.)

Types of Tiger

Even though there are officially eight subspecies of tiger, three of them (the Bali, Caspian and Javan Tigers) are already extinct. And the rest (the Bengal, Indochinese, Sumatran, Siberian and South China Tigers) are endangered.

Of the 6000 or so tigers left in the world, around 1500 are in captivity. This is one of the only ways to protect them so that they don't all become extinct. In the wild, a tiger can live up to ten years, but in captivity it can live up to 20.

Who Is Killing The Tiger?

There are two reasons why tigers are very quickly disappearing: one is decline in territory. This means that humans cut down jungles so that they can build cities, leaving many tigers homeless, hungry, and often starving to death.

The other reason is poaching. Poaching means an animal is killed for its body parts. It's actually illegal to do this, but it happens all the time. And unfortunately, business is booming.

A tiger is killed for its coat (which can fetch up to \$20,000), bones (used in traditional Chinese medicine), and other body parts (like the eyes which are sold as good luck charms). This cat has been – and still is – so hunted by humans that it is in *real* danger of being wiped out altogether.

Did You Know?

Tiger Talk

You know that a tiger can roar, just like a lion. But did you know that a surprised tiger woofs like a dog, and a happy tiger makes mewling sounds just like your family cat?

Tiger Eyes

Even though a tiger's eyesight is poor compared to the other big cats, its night vision is about six times better than a human's.

Tiger Tongue

When a tiger gets close to the end of its meal, it uses its very rough tongue to literally *peel* flesh from the bones of the animal.

Is That A Black Tiger?

Black tigers are rare, but if you ever saw one you'd notice that it has yellowish and sometimes white stripes on a black background.

Is That A White Tiger?

Some Bengal Tigers are white. They are not albinos, but simply white tigers. They have blue eyes, pink noses, and creamy white fur with chocolate-coloured stripes.

Mmm...chocolate...