

The majestic and the cute

TEXT A: Tigers

In recent months there have been two pieces of good news in the fight to save the tiger. First of all, tigers were discovered living very high up on the slopes of the Himalayas, above the tree-line (above 4,000 metres): previously it was believed that they could not live at such a height.

The second piece of good news was a conference, the International Tiger Forum, which recently took place in St Petersburg, Russia. It was attended by members of 13 countries where the huge cats still live and it was the highest level meeting ever held on this topic; the delegates all agreed to double tiger numbers by 2022. It was decided that countries need to work together, across borders, to protect these majestic animals and their habitat.

Such promises are necessary to save the tiger from extinction. There has been a 40% drop in numbers over the past ten years and a 97% drop over the past century, when there were believed to be around 100,000. There are now between 3,200–3,500 remaining in the wild globally, with around half of them in India. Only about 1,000 of these tigers are breeding females.

Tigers' habitats are threatened by human activity such as deforestation and development, as well as by climate change, for example rising sea levels in coastal areas. As tigers are forced into smaller areas to live, this also makes poaching easier and this remains the largest threat: the trade of tiger body parts continues even though it is banned globally.

The cost of keeping tigers alive in the world is around \$80 million per year. At the conference, more money was pledged to protect them. The question is, is it too late?

1 Read about your animal and take notes on the following aspects.

	Tigers	Pandas
1 How many are left?		
2 What is their survival threatened by?		
3 What is the good news?		
4 What is going to be done to save them?		

2 Exchange your information. Take notes on what you hear, to complete the grid.

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TEXT B: Pandas

Pandas have been on the Earth for over three million years but they are now in danger of dying out. Experts estimate that there are 1,000–1,600 animals left in the wild, mainly in south-west China. In recent decades 80% of their habitat has disappeared as bamboo forests have been cut down for construction and agriculture. Their habitat has now been split into separate 'islands', which makes finding a partner and breeding very difficult. Pandas also have a low birth-rate: female pandas can only become pregnant for three days a year.

Special panda centres have been established to help the bears survive and the good news is that 2010 was a record year for panda births. As there are now around 300 captive pandas globally, experts say they will soon be able to release the animals back into the wild. For example, the Chengdu centre in Sichuan, south-west China was started twenty years ago with six rescued animals and it now has over 100. This particular centre has bought panda habitat (bamboo forests), using money it has earned by lending pandas to zoos across the world.

Breeding pandas in captivity is difficult. Pandas give birth to twins in 50% of cases, but the weaker twin is usually rejected because the mothers do not have enough milk. At the centres, the carers trick the mothers into thinking that they have just one panda cub, secretly swapping the babies around up to 10 times a day. At another of the centres – Hetaoping – the scientists wear panda suits, so that the babies think they are in their natural habitat! This is to protect the young pandas, as when they are older, they may be released into the wild.

These centres are man-made solutions to man-made problems. In a few years time it will be clear how successful these solutions really are.

1 Read about your animal and take notes on the following aspects.

	Tigers	Pandas
1 How many are left?		
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2 Exchange your information. Take notes on what you hear, to complete the grid.

3 Work in pairs to decide what the questions are for these answers.

- 1 over 3 million years _____
- 2 300 _____
- 3 above 4,000 metres _____
- 4 in St Petersburg _____
- 5 50% _____
- 6 three days a year _____
- 7 100,000 _____
- 8 80% _____
- 9 panda suits _____
- 10 3,200–3,500 _____

4 Do you agree or disagree with the following points? Why?

- It is our duty to protect these two animals, at whatever cost. After all, it is human behaviour which has caused the problem.
- There are people and other causes in greater need of financial help.
- Pandas and tigers are lucky because they are generally considered to be beautiful or cute in human eyes.
- Bringing pandas up in a human environment is unlikely to succeed: when the bears are released into the wild, they will not survive.
- There are many different ways in which these animals can be helped.

5 Look at the different words used to replace the word *tiger(s)* in Text A paragraph 2 and *young pandas* in Text B paragraph 3. Why are so many different words used?

6 Look at the words in bold below, which are all used in the text but with different meanings. What is the difference between the two meanings?

- 1 I'm going to **poach** an egg for my breakfast. Want one?
- 2 Those colours really **suit** him.
- 3 I can't **bear** this heat any longer. I'm going outside.
- 4 The **centre** of the cake was uncooked.
- 5 The **earth** was wet and thick. It stuck to the farmer's boots.
- 6 We found a nice **level** spot by the river to have our picnic.

Glossary

bamboo (*noun*) - a tall tropical plant, with thick brown stems, used to make furniture

ban (*verb*) - to say officially that something is not allowed or illegal

breed (*verb*) - if animals breed, they become parents of young animals (*adj*) **breeding**: a *breeding pair*

captivity (*noun*) - a situation in which wild animals are kept in a place such as a zoo

cub (*noun*) - a young bear, lion or other wild animal

delegate (*noun*) - someone who is chosen to represent a group of other people at a meeting

extinction (*noun*) - when something such as a type of animal or plant stops existing

habitat (*noun*) - the type of place that an animal or plant normally lives in

lucrative (*adj*) - bringing a lot of money

poach (*verb*) - to illegally catch or kill an animal on private property (*noun*) **poaching**

threaten (*verb*) - to be likely to harm or destroy something: *they felt their jobs were threatened by the new industries* (*noun*) **threat**