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## The Smallest Tiger

*And the most beautiful at the same time*

The world's most beautiful tiger is at the same time the smallest: the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*). This tiger subspecies inhabits the island of Sumatra and is today reduced to a number of 600-800 individuals. The Siberian tiger is the largest cat ever to exist, measuring up to 2.8 m (9.3 ft) without the tail in length and weighing up to 384 kg (850 pounds), which is almost twice the weight of a lion. The Bengal tiger is slightly larger than a lion (the male is 3 m [10 ft] long and weighs 250 kg [450 pounds] while the female is 2.7 m long and 140 kg heavy) while the Indochinese tiger is smaller. However, the Sumatra tiger is not longer than 1.8 m (6 ft) in length (tail excluded) and weighs 120 kg (270 pounds) in the case of the male, having the size of a large jaguar. The extinct Java and Bali tigers were even smaller, about the size of a leopard. The main current stronghold of the Sumatran tiger is represented by the Way Kambas National Park. The decrease in number of this tiger is due to habitat loss and deforestation that aimed to make room for agricultural terrains. Poaching too has left its mark on the species, as this tiger has the most brightly colored fur of all subspecies, which virtually makes it highly priced on foreign markets. The hair is shorter than in the case of other tigers, and the head has a pair of well marked sideburns. The presence of the tiger is signaled by soil traces and scratches on the barks of the trees, which practically mark the territory of the feline. During the day, these tigers use to cool off in sloughs with clean water. Most hunting expeditions take place in the evening. This smaller tiger needs to consume 5-7 kg (11-16 pounds) of meat daily. The main prey is composed by hoofed mammals (deer, wild boars, and tapirs) and primates (monkeys and gibbons). The tigers also kill pythons, but younger individuals tend to refuse this type of white meat. Despite the small size, this tiger has a vicious character, and it has been involved in many human attacks. Usually, these killer individuals are too old or too young, and many attacks have been linked to prey shortage (due to poaching) and habitat loss. This tiger adapts relatively easily to captivity. Females usually give birth to 2-3 cubs. The Sumatran tiger is known to be able to swim up to 30 km at sea and can take 10-15 m (33-50 ft) long jumps.