The Moscow Times
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Unique Stripes Could Help Save Amur Tigers From Extinction

By The Moscow Times

May 28, 2014



The Amur tiger is a highly endangered species, of which only a few hundred remain in the Russian Far East.

The one-of-a-kind patterns that make Amur tiger pelts so desirable to poachers may help researchers to find out how many of the endangered animals remain in the Russian Far East.

Researchers at the Sikhote-Alin natural reserve in the Primorye region have started installing camera traps to capture images of Amur tigers and plan to use the patterns of their stripes, which are unique like fingerprints, to identify and count the animals living in the area, the park said Tuesday in an online statement.

The camera traps, produced by U.S. company Bushnell, work noiselessly and use invisible infrared flash, "so they do not bother the animals at all," the statement said.

WWF, a leading international conservation organization, has also used camera traps with

infrared triggers to gather wildlife data in remote locations.

"While a 'camera trap' might sound menacing, it actually does no harm at all to wildlife," WWF said on its website.

Researchers have also used camera traps to compile images of hundreds of tigers in India, and developed pattern-recognition software that could be used to match tiger skins traded on the black market with images in the database to help identify where poachers killed the animal, Discovery News reported earlier.

The Amur tiger is a highly endangered species, of which only a few hundred remain in the Russian Far East, their main habitat.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare has recently placed their number at 360, down from more than 400 at the turn of the century — a decline attributed to poaching, logging, wildfires and a decline in the population of their prey.

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