

Big Cats Film Showcase — Movie Programming Kit



Broken Tail: A Tiger's Last Journey

Produced by Crossing the Lines Films (broadcast by PBS)

Year of Release: 2010

Length: 90 minutes

English Level: Easy

Themes: Wildlife Conservation

Content warnings: None

Screening Details:

- The U.S. Department of State has received permission to screen this film at U.S. Embassies/Consulates and at American Spaces for calendar year 2018. Public screenings should be open to the public free of charge.
- For instructions on how to access the films, see the Big Cats Film Showcase one-pager.

Synopsis

The tiger known as “Broken Tail” was born in Ranthambhore National Park in northern India – a vast, natural reserve for a wide variety of Indian wildlife, but especially famous for its Bengal tigers. Wildlife filmmaker Colin Stafford-Johnson and local guide, Salim Ali, spent over 600 days following and filming Broken Tail and his family. Then, one day, Broken Tail simply disappeared. A year later, Johnson and Ali heard news that Broken Tail was killed by a train in Darra, 100 miles away from Ranthambhore.

How did Broken Tail travel so far away from home? Why did he leave in the first place? Stafford-Johnson and Ali set off on horseback, tracing Broken Tail's last journey, looking for answers. Talking to poachers and interviewing eyewitnesses, the duo travel across India, learning some surprising facts from this remarkable tiger's passage, and hoping they will help in the conservation of this endangered species.

Documentary Goals

Broken Tail: A Tiger's Last Journey uses the story of one tiger and its long journey in northern India to illustrate the many challenges that the entire species faces in its struggle to survive. It reveals how the loss of habitat to encroaching human populations and economic development has threatened tiger populations, but also how effective action by local governments can help restore the conditions that allow tigers to thrive.

Countries Featured

- India

Key Vocabulary

- **nature reserve** – an area that is reserved and managed for nature conservation and to provide special opportunities for study or research
- **conservation** – the protection or restoration of the natural environment, ecosystems, vegetation, and wildlife
- **habitat** – the natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism

Background Information

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is the largest cat species, most recognizable for its pattern of dark vertical stripes on reddish-orange fur with a lighter underside. Tigers are apex predators, primarily preying on large and medium-sized animals such as deer. They are territorial and generally solitary animals, often requiring large contiguous areas of habitat that support their prey requirements. This need for space, coupled with the fact that tigers are indigenous to some of the more densely populated places on Earth, has caused significant conflicts with humans.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), there are six existing subspecies of tiger, including the Bengal tiger. Three previously recognized subspecies (Bali Tiger, Javan Tiger, Caspian Tiger) are now extinct. The species is listed as Endangered.

Comprehension Questions

- What are some of the threats to tigers around Ranthambore?
 - Hunting; loss of habitat because of agriculture and mining
- According to the filmmaker, why is tiger conservation necessary for human wellbeing?

- Tigers bring the political attention that leads to proper law enforcement on nature reserves
- How many tigers are estimated to exist in India today?
 - 2000

Discussion Questions

- Consider the poor man who hunts tigers to earn money for his family. Was it wrong for him to kill the tigers?
- In countries where tigers live, what responsibility do governments have to protect tigers? Do countries without tigers share a responsibility to protect tigers?
- What responsibility do humans have in preventing the extinction of other animals?
- How important is the conservation of tigers and other animals to you?

More Information

- IUCN on the status of tiger populations - <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/15955/0>
- Smithsonian Zoo on general tiger facts - <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/tiger>