

Sumatran tigers nearly extinct in Way Kambas

The critically-endangered Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) population in Way Kambas National Park (TNWK) has declined past recent estimates as a result of poaching and the destruction of wildlife habitats. The latest data issued by the TNWK in Lampung this month showed that the number of Sumatran tigers in the park has dwindled to the brink of extinction.

Coordinator of the Sumatran Tiger Rescue and Conservation Foundation (PKHS) Sumianto said the current number of tigers found in the 125,000-hectare national park was estimated at less than 30.

He added that in 2000 the population was estimated at 36 to 40 tigers.

"We monitored their number through camera traps in 2010 and estimated that there were around 30 tigers, a decrease compared to 2000," Sumianto said on Monday.

According to Sumianto, the biggest threats against Sumatran tigers in TNWK are poaching and deforestation.

"The population of the Sumatran tiger has continued to decline, as their reproduction rate is very slow.

They may become extinct in TNWK if there are no serious efforts made by the government to preserve the forest and stop poachers," he said.

"The gestation period of a Sumatran tiger is 20 months, but that's still no guarantee, because tigers are regarded as less prolific in terms of breeding," he added.

In 2007, the Lampung Forestry Office, TNWK and Bukit Barisan National Park (TNBBS) expressed high hopes of increasing the number of Sumatran tigers, thanks to the drop in poaching between 2004 and 2007. However, they could not show the latest valid data on the Sumatran tiger populations at TNWK and TNBBS. In 2003, TNBBS rangers discovered 13 cases of tiger poaching. The number of cases dropped to nine in 2004 and only one case was recorded in 2005. Prior to 2002, tiger poaching was alarmingly prevalent.

TNWK and TNBBS attributed the drop in the number of poaching cases to hard work by those protecting the forest. No cases of Sumatran tiger poaching in Lampung were reported between 2004 and 2011. However, that doesn't mean that animal poaching has stopped, as Sumatran tigers still exist in the parks.

Poachers and animal traders are still present near TNBBS as well. Besides that, Lampung is known as a source in the illegal wildlife trade among Java, Bali and South Sumatra. Many poachers' traps can still be found in TNWK.