



TIGER TRACKS

VOLUME IV ISSUE IV

"Using science, through international cooperation, to save the tiger of the snow"

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MISSION STATEMENT

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DERSU THE TRAPPER

In 1902, a Russian geographer named V.K. Arseniev, along with a small band of Cossacks, set out on the first of numerous expeditions to map Ussuria, a wild unknown area of the Russian Far East. During his travels, Arseniev met and befriended Dersu Uzala, an aboriginal hunter, and member of the fast disappearing Gold tribe, who had lived his entire life in the taiga. An extraordinary tracker and naturalist, Dersu respected his forest home, believing that everything was inter-connected and alive. Dersu became Arseniev's guide and close friend, and over the years they shared many hair-raising adventures, including surviving a blizzard, flood, forest fire, bandits, and even tigers! The novel, *Dersu the Trapper*, a Russian classic, is not only Arseniev's memoirs, but also a tale of adventure in the wilds of tiger territory. This is an excerpt of their encounter with a Siberian tiger, or *Amba*, as it is called by the local native people.....

It was about eleven in the morning, quite time for the caravan to have overtaken us, but from the forest behind us not a sound could be heard.

"We'd better wait a bit," I said to Dersu.

He stopped, slipped his rifle off his shoulder and leant it against a tree, stuck his prop into the ground, and began to look for his pipe.

"Oh, dear! Me lost my pipe!" he exclaimed in anguish. "Me think pipe near, must go back look-see." As we headed back, Dersu muttered, "How me lost pipe? Means me got old.....what?" He did not finish his phrase, stopped in the middle of a word, stepped back, stooped, and examined something on the ground at his feet. I stepped up to him. He was looking round with a rather worried air, and whispered:

"Look-see captain! That is *Amba*! He go behind us. That very bad, very. Track quite fresh. Him quite near now."

I looked, and there saw the perfectly distinct and fresh impressions of an immense cat's paw, standing out sharply printed in the muddy track. It was clear that the brute had come along since we had passed, in the same direction as ourselves, that he was following on our heels.

"Him near, hid there," said Dersu, pointing towards the right. "He stood still here long time, when we stopped hunt pipe. We come back, he jump quickly one side. Look-see captain, no water in track."

I looked. Although there were puddles all round, the water had not found its way into this quite fresh pug-mark. There



could be no doubt that the great brute had stood there and then, hearing our returning

steps, had sprung into the thicket and vanished behind some fallen tree.

"Him not go far. Me know well. Wait, captain!"

We stood there silently a few minutes in the hope that some sound would betray the presence of the tiger, but there was the silence of the grave. In that silence I felt mystery and fear.

"Captain," at last said Dersu, turning to me. "Now must look well. See rifle loaded. Go softly, softly, no hurry. This is *Amba*.....Understand? *Amba*!"

As he spoke, he was looking attentively at every tree, at every branch. We walked on, Dersu all the time ahead, never taking his eyes off the path.

We had not gone more than a couple hundred yards before we came upon the spoor of the tiger again. Once more the great brute was tracking us and, as the first time, scenting our approach, had sprung aside to avoid meeting us. Dersu stopped and, turning to the side where the tiger was hidden, called out loudly, in a voice in which could be heard a note of irritation:

"Why you go behind, *Amba*? What you want, *Amba*? We go our way, you go yours, you no bother us. Why you keep come behind? Taiga big place, room for us and you, what?"

He brandished his rifle in the air.

I had never seen him in such an excited state. In his eyes I could clearly read his



"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher standard of living is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free."
Aldo Leopold

**SIBERIAN TIGER PROJECT
RESEARCH TEAM**

Maurice G. Hornocker
Co-Director

Howard B. Quigley
Co-Director

Dale G. Miquelle
Regional Coordinator

Yevgeny Smirnov
Russian Research
Associate

Kathy S. Quigley
Veterinary Coordinator

John Goodrich
Field Operations
Coordinator

Linda Kerley
Field Operations
Coordinator

Igor Nikalae
Russian Research
Associate

Bart O. Schleyer
Research Associate

The Siberian Tiger Project is funded partially by grants from the National Geographic Society, Exxon's *Save The Tiger Fund* at the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society, and private donations. The Siberian Tiger Project is a registered trademark of the Hornocker Wildlife Institute.

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unshaken belief that the tiger heard and understood his words. He was convinced that the tiger would either accept his challenge or leave us in peace.

We waited about five minutes, and then the old man heaved a sigh of relief, lit his pipe, slung his rifle over his shoulder, and started off down the trail with a carefree stride. He had put the tiger to shame and it had gone away.



We trekked on through the forest until about three in the afternoon. I decided to stop here for the night, as I

was very anxious to do a bit of shooting in the bog, especially as we had been a long time without meat, living for the last four days on nothing but biscuit.

We had some supper, and then Dersu and I went to see if we could get some meat. Our track took us across the clearing to the salt-pans near the edge of the forest.

Choosing a suitable spot, we sat and waited for the game to arrive. I leant against a stump and had a good look around. The darkness soon became deeper round the shrubs and under the trees. Dersu was a long time in settling down.

Around reigned a silence as of death, broken only by the monotonous buzz of the mosquitoes. Suddenly my ear caught a rustle. I was not mistaken. The rustle came from the bushes on the far side of the salt-pans, exactly facing us. I glanced at Dersu. I could just distinguish how he had thrust his head forward, and it seemed as though he were straining the whole power of his vision to peer through the darkness and pick out the cause of the sound.

Suddenly through the air there hit our ears a threatening growl like distant thunder.

Grrrrrrr!

Dersu gripped me by the arm.

"Amba, captain!" he exclaimed in a startled voice.

Dread gripped my heart. I would like to describe my feelings at that moment, but I can hardly do it.

I felt a kind of faintness overcome me, and a tremendous weight seemed to press me to the ground. My knees seemed to collapse, as though filled with lead.

"Bad; we done wrong come here; Amba angry. This his place," I heard Dersu

whisper, and I do not know if he was speaking to me or talking to himself.

Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr! again resounded through the still air.

Suddenly Dersu stood up. I thought he was going to shoot. But to my intense astonishment I could see that he did not hold his weapon in his hand, and I was more surprised than ever when I heard him speak to the tiger.

"All right. Amba. No be angry... no need be angry. This your place. We not know. We go now quick to another place. Taiga big; plenty room. No be angry!" Dersu stood there, holding out his arm toward the brute. Suddenly he fell upon his knees, bowing twice to the ground, and in an undertone muttered something rapidly in his own tongue. Then at length Dersu slowly raised himself, stepped up to my stump, and took his rifle.

"Come, Captain," he said in a decisive tone, and without waiting for my answer, quickly strode off through the bushes.

I followed him without replying.

Dersu's serene expression, the confidence with which he strode on without glancing around, reassured me.

I felt sure that the tiger would not follow or attack us.

When we had gone a couple of hundred yards, I stopped him and suggested waiting a little longer.

"No," he replied. "Me no can do. Me tell you now, in company will now never shoot Amba.... Never! You hear this well captain. You shoot Amba....you not my comrade."

Again we strode forward in silence. I wanted to stay there alone, but that feeling of apprehension overcame me, and I ran after Dersu.

We walked in silence the whole way back to camp. Each of us was filled with his own thoughts, his own memories. I thought of Dersu's stories about his encounters with tigers, and how he could not shoot them because they are gods, who protect the ginseng from men. I thought of how once a tiger had severely mauled him, and how his wife had tracked him for several days and eventually found him, exhausted from loss of blood.

Still, I was sorry that I had not seen the tiger.



TIGER UPDATES

OLGA: We believe that Olga has new cubs! In early fall she localized her movements to a small portion of her home range, behavior typical of a tigress caring for small cubs at a den site. With the onset of winter, we are able to combine radio tracking with snow tracking, and more easily determine if we are correct. If so, the snow will help us tell how many cubs Olga has traveling with her.

NATASHA: Natasha's previous litter of three cubs is rarely with her anymore. They are well over one year old, and will soon leave their mother to set up their own home ranges. We are watching Natasha closely to determine when she will produce her next litter. In the fall, we captured her while trying to radio-collar one of her cubs. She was in good physical condition at that time.

MARY IVANNA: Despite extensive aerial and ground searches, we still have not heard Mary Ivanna's signal since summer. Her cub Tonya, radio-collared in 1997, is still traveling within Mary Ivanna's home-range, and we hope that she will settle there. Tonya is now over two years old, an age by which young tigers usually have dispersed.

KATERINA: Katerina (Katia) and her new litter moved away from their den site in early September. We still do not know how many cubs she has, but the snow season has begun and we expect to find out any time now. We do know her cubs have survived their first few months though, because Katia still limits her movements to small areas, rather than traveling throughout her home range. On a sad note, a young female tiger was hit and killed by a truck in Katia's home range; a tiger we believe may have been Katia's daughter from her previous litter.

GENY: Since Katia and her cubs have started moving, Geny has been spending more time near them. He does, however, continue to use the outskirts of his home range more often than usual. Once we even located him near the outskirts of the town of Terney. We kept a close eye on him at that time, but even though he walked within 50 meters of several cows and goats, he did not cause any trouble.

KOUZA: Although we have actively searched for Kouza for the past year, we are very disappointed to report that we still have not been able to locate him. We will continue searching, but we have to accept that we may not find him again. There are three possible fates for Kouza. First, is that his radio-collar has been damaged somehow, and is not transmitting a radio-signal. Second, is that he has set up a home territory far to the south of our study area, and is beyond our aerial searching range, and third, is that he may have been killed by poachers. We have no evidence to indicate that he has been killed, so we would like to believe that one of the other options is his fate. We will keep you posted.

MONYA: Regretfully, Monya is no longer with us. In early 1995, project scientists recognized that his radio-collar had indicated "inactivity" for a number of days. Reluctantly, they investigated, hoping they would find only a problem with Monya's collar. But, their worst fears were realized when they came upon his skinned body lying where he had fallen; his young life ended by a poacher's bullet. If you are a Monya sponsor, your donation will be distributed among all the tigers. Or, if you prefer, contact customer service at 310-887-4050 to select another tiger. *Thank you.*

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Tigers and Livestock

Siberian tigers rarely kill livestock near the Sikhote-Alin Reserve. Cows, horses, and sheep are plentiful, and many farmers routinely let their animals wander unattended in the woods, even overnight. Although an easy meal, tigers usually leave these easy animals alone.

In the first five years of the Siberian Tiger Project, tigers killed an average of one domestic animal per year. But, as noted in the Fall 1997 Tiger Updates, that situation has changed recently. A young male tiger, probably Olga's son, has developed a fondness for domestic meat. A beef cow worth about \$350, or about one month's salary, is not an insignificant loss, and this year at least 10 cows have been killed near Terney.

Part of our work in the Russian Far East involves finding methods of alleviating problems that can occur when tigers and people live in close proximity. Mostly, this involves teaching people how to live with tigers, and how to learn to take proper care of their livestock so their animals do not become easy prey. The current situation has provided us with a good teaching opportunity, because our investigations have put us in close contact with many farmers in the area. It has also led to

numerous educational newspaper articles by Dr. Yevgeny Smirnov, tiger biologist for the Sikhote-Alin Reserve.

Our program encourages people to have a herder with their cows at all times, and to bring their cows in at night. We also have a compensation program, and pay farmers for livestock killed by tigers. But, we pay for the cows only when the farmer has been caring properly for the livestock. Those farmers who do not receive compensation because of poor husbandry practices learn quickly that it pays to keep their livestock close to home. We hope that our program will become a model for the region.

ПОГОВОРИМ ПО РУССКИ

(Poh-goh-voh-ream Poh Rooske - *Let's speak some Russian*)

КУХНЯ (Koohk-nyah) - Russian word for kitchen.

МАШИНА (Mah-shen-nah) - Russian word for automobile or car.

БАБУШКА (Bah-boosh-kah) - Russian word for grandmother.



1998; "The Year of the Tiger"



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Siberian Tiger Project
University of Idaho
P.O. Box 3246 Moscow, ID 83843

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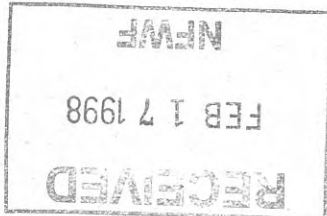
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TIGER TRACKS

Newsletter of the Siberian Tiger Project™

SUMMER/1999

VOLUME VI

"Using science, through international cooperation, to save the tiger of the snow"

ISSUE II

IN THIS ISSUE...

Do more tigers mean less meat on the table?

A serious accident:
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Become a Member

Do More Tigers Mean Less Meat on the Table?

In the natural world, the balance between predator and prey is a fragile one. Siberian tigers, the top predator living in the Russian Far Eastern forests, rely on a number of prey species for survival. The elk, or ИЗЮБ (Eee-zoo-brr), as it is known in Russian, makes up more than half the tiger's diet. A close second food choice of the tiger is the wild boar, or КАБАН (Kah-bahn) in Russian.

A strongly debated topic in the Russian Far East these days is the effect tigers have on those prey populations. With the economic problems in Russia getting worse, Russians are increasingly depending on these same ungulate species for feeding their own families. What is the impact of tigers on prey populations? As the tiger population increases, do the animal populations tigers rely on for food automatically decrease? Is there a dynamic equilibrium between tiger and ungulate populations? What are the population dynamics of tiger prey species - primarily elk and wild boar?

Last winter, the Siberian Tiger Project initiated a new project to address those very questions. Dale Miquelle, regional coordinator for the Siberian Tiger Project, with Russian ungulate biologist Alexander Myslenkov, began capturing and radio-collaring elk. In the fall and winter months, snow begins to accumulate in the higher elevations, making it harder for

animals to hunt and eat efficiently. Most animals, including deer and elk, migrate to the lower elevations where snow is not as deep and hunting, or foraging, is easier. The trapping team was successful in radio-collaring fifteen elk, and have been monitoring their movements ever since. Next winter, the second phase of the project will be initiated. At that point, Russian biologist Olga Zaumuslava, along with Dale, will initiate efforts to capture, radio-collar, and

begin following the movements of wild boar.

Very little is known about the dynamics of these ungulate populations. We do know that they likely travel great distances looking for food, but how far and what routes are unknown. Are their movements mirrored by the movements of our radio-collared tigers? How much of the movements of our tigers are attributable to the movements of its prey? All we do know for certain, as



Photo by: HWI

Is there a dynamic equilibrium between tiger and wild boar populations?

mentioned earlier, is that they migrate to the lower elevations in winter, congregating in large groups.

These species, tigers and their prey, have co-existed together in the same ecological community for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and developed ways of existing together. Life in the forest is difficult for each of these species, demanding large amounts of energy just to live.

The data to-date is not very complete. Four of the fifteen radio-collared elk have died so

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—Aldo Leopold

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far. One was killed by a poacher, and one by natural causes, most likely starvation; one was a yearling that was most likely killed by a lynx, and the fourth elk was killed by a tiger, probably Geny.

It will be some time still, but in the final analysis, we will find some answers to the questions above. Initially, however, we are finding that although tiger populations have increased significantly over the past three or four years, prey populations have not decreased as would be expected if tigers were a legitimate competitive force for hunters. We will keep you informed as this important part of the Siberian Tiger Project goes forward. Nature exists in a balance, and this is all part of that balance.

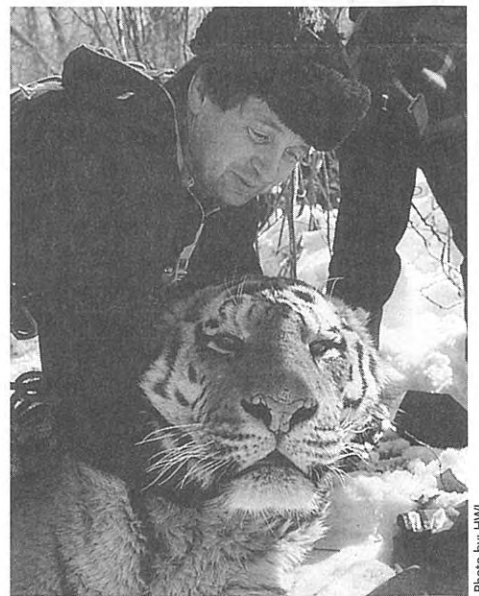
A Serious Accident

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

As field biologists, our work often takes us into rugged terrain far from human habitations. Although we don't think of our jobs as dangerous, we constantly remind ourselves that relatively minor injuries can be serious when help is far away. As precautions, we rarely go out alone, we always let someone know where we are going and when we will be back, we carry complete first-aid/survival kits, and we carry small radio transmitters, just like those used on tigers, so a person can quickly be found should they not return from the forest on schedule. We also try to stay in top physical condition, so that we can help our partners or ourselves. Even though we are careful, accidents do happen.

In early spring, Kola and Sosha Reebin, two of the Siberian Tiger Project's Russian field technicians, were radio-tracking Tonya in a very remote and rugged area of the Sikhote-Alin Reserve. Early one morning, they left a small cabin, and climbed a mountain to search for Tonya's signal. Just before they reached the summit, a large rock broke loose, and fell on Kola, breaking three bones in his lower leg and foot. Kola is a big man, nearly 200 pounds, and the country was very steep, so Kola's brother Sosha was unable to support him and carry him down the mountain. Kola had to crawl nearly two miles, in the snow, down the mountain to reach the cabin. The brothers finally arrived at the cabin after dark, and once Sosha had a fire going in the stove, and Kola was comfortable, Sosha left to hike the remaining eight miles to the car to get help.

A rescue mission was quickly launched, and in the early morning hours, during a blinding snowstorm, Kola was carried out of the forest and taken to the hospital, where doctors set his broken leg. Doctors also said that Kola's leg would have been much worse had he not been wearing heavy leather boots, donated to the Siberian Tiger Project by the Vasque company. Kola's accident was the first of its kind in seven years of the Siberian Tiger Project and a good reminder to us all to be careful. Kola is convalescing at home now, and should be back to normal in a few months.



Russian biologist Kola Reebin with a sedated Geny.

Photo by: HW

ПОГОВОРИМ ПО РУССКИ

LET'S SPEAK SOME RUSSIAN (Poh-goh-voh-ream Poh Rooske)

У ДАЧИ (Oo-dah-chee) – Russian word for “good-luck.”

ДВАДЦАТЬ (Dvahd-tset) – Russian word for “twenty.”

СЕМЬЯ (Syem-yah) – Russian word for “family.”

TIGER UPDATES

OLGA: Olga's 18-month-old daughter is still living within her mother's territory, but she is spending less and less time with Olga. Now that the cub has become more independent, Olga has time and energy for a new litter of cubs. We will watch Olga's movements carefully over the next few months, looking for any signs she has given birth to what will be her fourth litter.

NATASHA: Natasha and her three surviving cubs spent late winter and early spring in a remote rugged area far from people. Nonetheless, snow tracking in early spring confirmed that Natasha had only two cubs remaining. We do not know if disease, predation, or some other factor was responsible for the loss of Natasha's third cub, but mortality in young cubs is common. It is a difficult time of a tiger's life.

GENY: Geny spent most of early spring in a portion of his home range inhabited by the new tigress that replaced Emma. However, he seems to have some competition. Recently, our field biologists found tracks of another male tiger within Geny's home range. This new tiger is probably a young male, looking for a territory of his own, and will likely move on after a few encounters with Geny.

TONYA: Tonya is spending her time living within, and patrolling, her remote home territory. Although biologists have found her tracks in the snow, there is still no sign that she has given birth to cubs. The batteries in Tonya's radio-collar will fail soon, so her radio-collar will be changed in the near future.

MISHA: One of our field biologists had gone out radio-tracking. He was sleeping in a tent in a remote area, when a tiger's call awakened him. The tiger's calls grew louder and louder as the tiger approached, and although curious to know whether or not it was

a radio-collared tiger, he did not turn on the radio receiver for fear of scaring the tiger. Next morning, the biologist discovered Misha's tracks in the snow just 50 yards from the tent!

NADIA: On December 12, 1998, Nadia was killed by a poacher. Only one month earlier, tracks in the snow confirmed what biologists had long suspected: Nadia had given birth to three cubs. Born in May, the cubs were only 6 months old when Nadia was killed, and far too young to survive on their own in the wild. Project and Zapovednik biologists decided to let the cubs remain in the wild, and began feeding them near the site where Nadia was killed.

ANNA GERDA: Because a paved road bisects Anna Gerda's home range, this last winter, biologists were able to collect more data on her than on any other tiger in the study. Biologists followed Anna's tracks in the snow through several days of her travels, documenting every move, including how often and where she scent marked, how often she ate, and when she met with other tigers. Anna is a very important tiger for this study.

MEMORIALS: *Losses and gains in a population are normal and natural, even in human populations. Wild animals live a very hard life, especially those like the tiger who are under such stress. This is all part of the ebb and flow of life. Over the seven and one half years of this project, we have had our share of both losses and gains. We have documented more than eleven litters, yielding twenty-seven new tigers; and we have lost tigers too. Poachers have killed some tigers, like Monya and Nadia, while others, like Mary Ivanna, Katerina, Kouza, Emma, and Luba, we still don't know the fate of. But, through our continued efforts, and by working together, we hope to influence and reduce the losses, and secure the gains.*

See the website for newsletters at: <http://www.friendsoftheforest.org>



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Photo by: HWI

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