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Tiger Mascot Schools Unite To Save Wild Tigers

Clemson, South Carolina The student group Tigers for Tigers unleashed their passion to save Wild Tigers at Clemson University when they united with 13 other tiger mascot schools to create a new "National Tigers for Tigers Coalition." This is the first time a school's mascot is being used to kick-off a national campaign to save endangered wild animals powered by students. The coalition's first meeting was a conference held at Clemson University in South Carolina, from April 19-21, where the 37 students, who came from 7 different schools, gathered with their hearts and minds united.

During the conference, they discussed issues and formed the organization's goals and objectives. Two major actions for Tiger Advocacy they decided to focus on are: 1. Recovery of wild tiger populations around the world and 2. Support for decreasing private ownership of captive tigers in the USA. Various experts at the conference spoke about the serious issues facing tigers today, as well as highlighting campaigns that already underway in the United States.

Sean Carnell, president of Tigers for Tigers at Clemson said, "If we can develop a way for students across the country to collaborate on a national scale in support of tiger conservation, we can truly make a difference. As students, we have access to a plethora of resources that can amplify our efforts. We wish to provide opportunities for students of all majors to get involved in tiger conservation by gaining real-world experience and becoming inspired to save our beloved mascot."

The 13 Universities and Colleges (and state) involved with the coalition include: Auburn University (AL), Brenau University (GA), Clemson University (SC), Colorado College (CO), Doane College (NE), Hampden-Sydney College (VA), Louisiana State University (LA), University of Missouri (MO), Princeton University (NJ), Rochester Institute of Technology (NY), SUNY-Cobleskill (NY), Towson University (MD), and Trinity University (TX). In total 57 other schools were invited to join the coalition so more support is anticipated in the coming months.

The conference was supported by other international groups, like Tiger Trust which shared the complex challenges facing tigers in India, and the Minnesota Zoo Foundation's Dr. Ron Tilson, spoke about the biodiversity that is found in important tiger habitats. Other experts who attended came from the following groups: Society for Conservation Biology, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Big Cat Rescue, and National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA). Takako Sato, the founding Alumna of Clemson's Tigers for Tigers student group, now supports Tiger Trust as a consultant.

Tiger Trust, an organization that has been working in India for more than 5 decades on the issue, was able to contribute significantly to the conference. The Honorary Secretary, Anjana Gosain, was invited as the keynote speaker and in her talk, she addressed the many challenges that wild tigers face— habitat destruction, poaching and more increasingly human-animal conflict which results in revenge killing. As with many issues facing endangered wildlife and habitat, the issues are complex and multifaceted, but essentially, revenge killings are when a tiger has been blamed for killing a cow and then the tiger is killed by humans out of revenge. Mrs. Gosain showed a film "The Truth About Tigers" by Shekar Dattatri which is a 40 minute in-depth film which motivates it's viewers to become

a voice for the animals that have no voice of their own. She also introduced the internationally famous wild Tigress of Ranthambhore National Park, Machli in order to make the stark comparison of wild tigers to captive tigers. Throughout the conference, Mrs. Gosain continued to encourage the students to make the most of their youthful energy as she has been waging this battle for so many years and it's so encouraging to see them so engaged on the subject.

The USA has more captive tigers than there are wild tigers in the entire world. There is no clear number on how big the population of big cats is in the US, but it's estimated to be nearly 13,000. In the wild, there are estimates of 4,000 cats scattered in different Asian countries. Other speakers at the conference focused more on issues in America, such as the lack of laws controlling private ownership and breeding while in captivity. Tracy Coppola and Cynthia Carson from IFAW, shared the dire need to address that serious lack of policies controlling Big Cat ownership. They highlighted the USDA's lack of enforcement when trying to register owners and movement of the cats across state lines. Carol Baskin of Tampa's Big Cat Rescue and representative of the Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition emphasized the need to change the Laws on a federal level to prevent private ownership of big cats. She shared about the detrimental commercial use of tigers in cub-petting and "swimming with tigers" experiences where people could be harmed and the tigers are mistreated. Throughout her history of taking in unwanted or abused animals, she realized that it was the basic lack of laws and enforcement of laws that made her rescue center a necessity.

David Houghton (NWRA) asked the students to support the US Fish and Wildlife Service's "Wildlife Without Borders" Program. Projects like the US Postal Service's "Save Vanishing Species" series with Tiger stamps has helped raise over \$7 million dollars. His main emphasis was getting the students to be empowered with information so they can write and visit their congressional representatives by "going to the Hill!" Another speaker, John Fitzgerald from the Society of Conservation Biology, also encouraged the students to speak out about the basic laws protecting tigers. He shared some of the origins of the conservation movement in America and this information armed the students with the know-how to be able to speak with lawmakers and representatives confidently.

Takako Sato, who now lives in Japan, was one of the founding members of the Tigers for Tigers movement at Clemson University in 1997. She shared how the group started small but years later, that same spirit is being carried on by other students and Universities. Her experience with a Bengal tiger in the wild inspired her to take action for the tigers, and that commitment carries on 7 years later. She is still active in conservation efforts by working as a consultant for Tiger Trust as a grant writer and speaker about Tigers in Japan.

Tiger Trust feels compelled to create awareness to leave Tigers in the wild, able to live in their natural state, rather than being confined in a cage or being abused as entertainers. It holds the stance that taking tigers as pets is a very self-centered and egotistical way for the owner to feel powerful to have such animals under their control.

The next step for the coalition is to be able to secure funding so they can hire a national coordinator in order to grow, and organize national campaigns to continue to rally the students behind their cause. Here are some sites you can visit to find out more about raising your voice too!

Anyone can get involved with conservation, so empower yourself with knowledge and take action!

For more information visit the National Tigers for Tigers Coalition website: www.t4coalition.org

Educate Yourself and Take Action!

Big Cat and Public Safety Protection Act information (Questions answered about the Act)

<http://www.ifaw.org/united-states/news/6-questions-about-us-big-cats-and-public-safety-protection-act>

Cub-petting issue (8 Facts about how Tigers are abused in the US)

<http://bigcatrescue.org/abuse-issues/issues/pet-cubs/>

Support the US Fish and Wildlife Service by telling your representative this issue is important to you!

<http://www.fws.gov/international/how-you-can-help.html>

Help us promote the "Vanishing Species Stamp" sold by the USPS which raises money for wildlife conservation projects around the world

<http://www.fws.gov/international/save-vanishing-species-stamp.html>

Learn from the NWRA how important your voice can be for wildlife

<http://refugeassociation.org/friends-community/nwra-and-refuge-friends-groups/>