



Tiger, Tiger... Lost Forever

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The Earth has lost many creatures as a result of human activity: The dodo and the passenger pigeon are among the best known. But in more recent years, one of the most spectacularly tragic losses in nature was *Thylacinus cynocephalus*, commonly called the thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger.

The Tasmanian tiger was a truly unusual species. Shaped like a wolf or hyena, it had a ginger-colored coat streaked with gorgeous, Dr. Seussian black stripes. A predator, it could open its jaws astonishingly wide, so that its toothy gape resembled that of a crocodile. Most intriguing of all, this striped creature was a marsupial: It carried its young -- as many as four at a time -- in a pouch like a kangaroo.

For thousands of years, *Thylacinus Cynocephalus* lived in Tasmania, an island ark 150 miles south of the Australian mainland, which is still home to some of Earth's most extraordinary animals. And it lived well into the 20th century.

So what happened to this glorious beast?

Tasmania was colonized by the British in 1803, and the settlers soon brought in a large-scale sheep-raising industry. Tasmanian tigers occasionally raided their livestock, and as a result, a government bounty was set up and money paid to anyone who brought in a dead tiger. Shooting and snaring these rare marsupials became a lucrative business.

By the mid-1800s, naturalists were sending up red flags about the creature's imminent extinction. In 1863 the famed British wildlife artist John Gould warned, "When the comparatively small island of Tasmania becomes more densely populated, and its primitive forests are intersected with roads from the eastern to the western coast, the numbers of this singular animal will speedily diminish, extermination will have its full sway." He noted that the demise of the Tasmanian tiger would be a "source of much regret."

Learning Objectives:

The following lesson provides elementary/middle school students with:

- Information about how the Tasmanian tiger became extinct.
- Activities to learn about the reasons for its extinction.
- Activities to understand the characteristics this tiger shared with other animals.
- Activities to identify this tiger among other felines.
- Speaking skills

Grade level: 5th to 8th grade students (ages 9 -12)

Subjects: Science, reading, writing

By 1914 Gould's prediction was coming true. In that year biologist T. Thomas Flynn (the father of Tasmanian-born movie star Errol Flynn) proposed the establishment of a wildlife sanctuary to save the tigers from annihilation. But his warnings, like those of other naturalists, were ignored. Tigers continued to be shot and trapped. By the 1930s they were hardly ever seen, and in 1936, the last known Tasmanian tiger died at a Tasmanian zoo.

The extinction of the Tasmanian tiger is a source of much regret. And it's a source of mystification, too. Looking back, it's hard to comprehend how the Tasmanian settlers could have been so cavalier about the tiger's biological uniqueness -- so heedless of the consequences. It would have been easy to save the animal, but the only law ever passed to protect the species was enacted the same year the last captive one died.

Today the tiger remains the island of Tasmania's symbol, pictured on coins, flags and license plates. But it has, sadly, fallen into the realm of myth and mystery.

Note: Margaret Mittelbach and Michael Crewdson are the authors of "Carnivorous Nights: On the Trail of the Tasmanian tiger."

Reading Comprehension

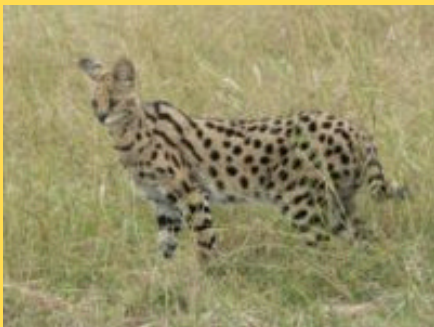
Read the passage and answer the questions.

Choose the right answer. The passage is about:

- ❖ The mystification of Tasmanian tigers.
- ❖ The reasons for Tasmanian tigers' extinction.
- ❖ The alarming decline of endangered species.

What is the topic sentence of the passage?

Can you identify the Tasmanian tiger among these three felines?



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What are the characteristics a Tasmanian tiger shares with some other animals? Complete the table with the right information from the passage.

Wolf/Hyena	Crocodile	Kangaroo

Complete the table about Tasmanian tiger.

Habitat	Diet	Behavior

Find synonyms for the following words in the passage.

- a- A reward, inducement, or payment, especially one given by a government for acts deemed beneficial to the state, such as killing predatory animals:
- b- Trapping:
- c- About to occur:
- d- The act or process of utter destruction:
- e- Careless:
- f- Profitable:

State the major causes that led to the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger.

Complete the table with the major events associated with the progressive extinction of the Tasmanian tiger.

1803	1914	1930	1936

How do Tasmanians try to revive the image of the Tasmanian tiger in their heritage?

How did some supporters of wildlife react to the alarming decline of the Tasmanian tiger?

Wildlife Supporters	Warning	Suggestion	Government's reaction
Naturalists			
John Gould			
Thomas Flynn			

How did the writers try to magnify the Tasmanian tiger? Pick out the relevant details from the passage.

What is the prevailing mood in the passage? Pick the right answer.

- ❖ Anger and disgust
- ❖ Revolt and hatred
- ❖ Sadness and regret

What is the implicit message of the writers? Pick the right answer.

- ❖ To hold Tasmanians responsible for the extinction of Tasmanian tiger.
- ❖ To prevent further extinction of more species by learning from the past.
- ❖ To predict the extinction of more species as a result of man's carelessness.

Classroom Discussion

1. How do you feel about the extinction story of the Tasmanian tiger?
2. Do you think that the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger was caused purely by the actions of mankind?
3. What measures could have been taken to save the Tasmanian tiger from extinction and how efficient would they have been?
4. Have lessons from the past taught present day man why it is so important to stop the extinction of more species?
5. Could one day some endangered species such as the tiger, the elephant, the polar bear, etc. remain just as symbols pictured on coins, flags, and licence plates in the same way as the Tasmanian tiger?
6. In recent times, why is the extinction of an endangered animal considered more shocking and revolting than it used to be years ago?

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