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Liu Duo

A senior officer with the World Wildlife Fund



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Above: Tiger feces also help rangers track the movements of Siberian tigers in the sanctuary.



Right: Park rangers analyze tiger feces to assess the health of the giant cats. — Xinhua

the last century, both Chinese and Russian trappers hunted the cats for the fur and bone trades. At the same time, hunting for deer and other forest denizens depleted the tigers' food supply, and logging destroyed habitat.

"The Amur tiger population is slowly recovering after preservation measures were enacted," said Liu Duo, a senior officer with the World Wildlife Fund. "In 2015, logging in natural forests was banned in China. In 2017, the national park was established, giving Amur tigers a stable and carefully maintained forest ecosystem to live in. This all points to a bright future for the tigers."

Rangers are at the frontline of ecosystem maintenance and the tigers' survival. Their work can be both tedious and dangerous.

Liu had no plans to become a ranger when he graduated from university with a degree in mechanics. After working in the southern Chinese city of

Shenzhen for three years, his parents urged him to return to Hunchun because he is their only child. But once home, Liu found suitable jobs scarce. Then he learned that the local forestry administration was recruiting rangers.

"The only requirement was a strong physical constitution, which I had," said Liu. "Besides, I have been familiar with the wildlife in Hunchun since childhood, so I applied for the job."

Liu and his colleagues go on 20-kilometer patrols in the forest, equipped with GPS navigation, food and water, a first-aid kit and a fire rocket used to scare beasts away.

The rangers actually see tigers very rarely. Their last encounter was three years ago when Liu and his two other rangers were checking on an infrared camera. They suddenly heard a roar from a nearby hillside.

"We stopped and looked around, trying to spot the tiger's location, but we didn't

see it," he recalled. "And then another growl came, and we knew immediately that we had to leave the area."

Facing the direction of the growls, the trio slowly stepped backward and didn't turn around to run until they had retreated for dozens of meters. Only after they were back on the safety of their patrol vehicle did they realize that they were sweating profusely.

The recovery of the wild Amur tiger population, however, has created a new problem: tiger encroachment in areas of human habitation.

Earlier this year, footprints of a big cat were spotted on a tree farm in Jilin. They turned out to belong to a grown male Amur tiger.

Last year in neighboring Heilongjiang Province, a tiger appeared in a village and confronted a woman working in a cornfield. As another villager rushed to the scene, the tiger bit the woman on the shoulder and fled. The tiger was



The location of the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park. — Illustration by Shen Xinyi

subsequently anesthetized and sent to a center in the province. The woman was sent to hospital and survived the ordeal. Now in Hunchun and other places near the national park, people are warned to stay away from forested areas if one of the big cats is reported to be in the vicinity.

Rangers are responsible for educating the public about the tigers. Liu often visits community groups in Hunchun to advise people what to do if

they encounter a wild tiger.

Liu Duo of the World Wildlife Fund said the goal is to promote a harmonious co-existence between humans and Amur tigers.

"Currently the Amur tiger population in Russia is close to saturation, but the habitat in China can hold at least another 320 or more tigers," he said. "A continuous, stable Amur tiger population is yet to be established here, but there is great hope."