

Tigers meditate in Thailand

The Kid travels to Thailand in Asia for the story of an interesting friendship.

From Bangkok, Thailand, we travel 100 miles west to meet the Tiger Whisperer.

A procession of Buddhist monks walking 400-pound Indo-Chinese tigers greets us as we arrive at the forest monastery in Kanahanaburi. What are the gentle monks doing with fierce tigers?

Phusit Khantitharo is the abbot in charge of the monastery. He didn't plan to become a Dr. Doolittle. He gained a reputation of talking with animals by caring for hurt or abandoned wild and pet animals. He is best known for his ability with tigers.

Over a century ago, Buddhist monks would sit on tiger skins as they meditated. This symbolized their ability to conquer their fear and desire.

Now the monks at the temple have conquered fear and created a rare sanctuary for endangered tigers.



Mek's name means cloud.



The temple's first sick tiger cub arrived seven years ago. Phusit did not have the heart to turn away the sick baby.

Other orphaned cubs followed. "I only wanted to rescue the tigers, that's all," said Phusit.

He learned to nurse, feed and train them.

Every afternoon the monks and volunteer keepers walk the tigers to Tiger Valley to play. Tourists must walk behind and are reminded not to step on the tigers' tails.

The original cubs have grown and have cubs of their own, born at the monastery.

The monastery is now called the Tiger Temple.

It is home to 17 tigers and water buffaloes, gaurs, wild boars, barking deer, ponies and peacocks.

Tigers are the largest of the big cats. Adults weigh 500 pounds. They are fierce hunters. The beau-

tiful golden-colored cats have black stripes for camouflage.

Over the past 100 years, 95% of Asia's tigers have disappeared. Three of the eight species of tigers have vanished and may be extinct.

The World Wildlife Fund estimates that there are fewer than 2,000 Indo-Chinese tigers.

Only 5,000 to 7,000 tigers total still live in the wild.

The monks are building a "New Home for Tigers." The project will include a moat around 12 acres of jungle in the forest monastery. This will allow the tigers to roam freely in a place safe from poachers.

The tigers at the monastery have been raised around people. They have not learned to hunt so they cannot live in the wild.

With the new facility, tiger cubs can be trained to survive in the jungle. They can live in a more natural habitat.

Word Search

Find these words: Asia, Buddhist, Cubs, Extinct, Fear, Habitat, Hunt, Monk, Temple, Thailand, Tiger, Wild

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