8201 The Principles of Restoration of Big Carnivorous Mammals' Populations and Reintroduction of Amur Tiger and Other Big Cats in Russia

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Numbers of the most species of large carnivores decreases in the wild due the loss of habitats, poaching and population fragmentation. Wildlife conservation needs restoration of populations/groups in different parts of the range but the experience in reintroduction methods is very poor. Few successful projects were dealing with reintroduction of small/medium carnivores (black-footed ferret, Iberian lynx) or translocation of adult animal (Bengal tiger). Large carnivores populations in captivity may have higher genetic diversity than in the wild and may be used as a source for reintroduction programs. For the first time we developed methods for the reintroduction of large cats. The main requirements to the reintroduced animals are natural hunting and social behavior, fear of humans. The methods were tested for Amur tiger. Tiger cubs-orphans (4-5 months of age) were collected in the wild after their mothers' death and placed in rehabilitation center. Cubs lived there for 1,2 years, without contacts with the humans and got training on ungulate hunting (at least 8-12 successful attempts). After this cubs collared with satellite transmitters were released in the wild. Due 2013-2014 six tiger cubs were released to the wild. Five of them are still alive and sixth tiger was captured back for zoo breeding project. Tiger cubs showed intensive exploratory behavior (especially males) and hunted successfully on wildboars, red and roe deer, moose, bear, wolf. This unique perspective experience planned to be used for other large cats reintroduction (Persian and Far-Eastern leopard). This study was supported by Russian Geographical Society.