

## Rare South China tiger photos fake, officials penalised

The photographs of a rare South China tiger claimed to have been taken by a farmer late last year in Shaanxi province have been fabricated, Chinese officials investigating the case have said.

Zhou Zhenglong, a farmer, had claimed that he had photographed the animal near his farm in Shaanxi province, raising hopes that the elusive cat, widely believed to be extinct, might still exist in the wild.

The government, following the publication of the photograph, had announced a reward of 20,000 yuan (\$2,915) for Zhou for the discovery.

The authorities have now arrested Zhou for fraud.

Thirteen officials have also been penalised in connection with the scandal, including the provincial forestry department deputy head Zhu Julong, for dereliction of duty.

In 1996, there were around 80 South China tigers in the wild, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The tigers were marked as critically endangered in the Red list of threatened species of the union.

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