

Pandas: cuddliest of all bears

The giant panda has a white head with black eye patches, ears and shoulders. Unlike other bear species, giant pandas are **herbivorous** spending up to 12 hours a day chewing bamboo shoots and roots. Because of poaching and habitat loss, they are extremely **rare**, living in small groups in the bamboo forests of China. Although there have been many international conservation efforts, it may not be enough to save this species.



Panda's Territory: Where do pandas come from?

Giant pandas have lived in the bamboo forests of China for thousands of years and have been honored by the Chinese for a very long time. In fact, giant pandas have appeared in Chinese art for thousands of years. Because the giant panda is considered a national treasure in China, it is **protected** by law so that it does not become extinct.

Although giant pandas have long been known to the Chinese, they have only been known to people living outside of China for just over 100 years. The first European to see a live giant panda in the wild *was* a German **zoologist** named Hugo Weigold. In 1916, he bought a cub while he was on **expedition**.

Where do pandas live?

There is only one place where giant pandas live in the wild: high in the mountains of central China. There, they are living in cold and rainy bamboo forests that are often misty and covered in heavy clouds. Years ago, giant pandas lived in lowland areas. However, as people built more and more farms and cities on that land, the giant pandas were forced up into the high mountains.

Panda's Lunch: What do pandas eat?

In the wild, a giant panda's diet is nearly **entirely** bamboo. Bamboo is a giant grass that grows in the mountains of China. Because bamboo is so low in **nutrients**, an adult giant panda needs to eat about 15 kilograms of bamboo each day. It eats the stems, shoots, leaves and all.

There are about 25 different types of bamboo that wild pandas will eat. Pandas not only eat bamboo, but also other grasses, insects and occasionally, small **rodents**.

In zoos, giant pandas eat bamboo too, but they also eat sugar cane, rice gruel, carrots, apples and sweet potatoes.

Panda Cubs: How are baby pandas born?

When a giant panda is first born, it is tiny. It weighs about as much as a hen's egg. At birth, it is pink, blind, helpless and hairless. During this time, the mother cares for it closely, often holding it in her paw and keeping it close to her chest. The cub doesn't open its eyes until it is six weeks old and it doesn't walk until it is three months.



Cubs drink milk from their mothers for about nine months but they stay with their mothers for a long time after that. In fact, it can be up to three years before a giant panda cub leaves its mother.

How does a panda spend the day?

In the wild, giant pandas spend most of their time resting, eating or looking for food. Unlike other bear species, giant pandas do not **hibernate** during the winter months. They also do not build **permanent** dens. Instead, they shelter in caves and trees.

Pandas are good climbers. They can also swim, though they spend most of their time on land. Although they might seem pretty quiet, giant pandas do make a lot of growling and honking sounds.

Why are pandas endangered?

Today, giant pandas are at risk of becoming extinct. Only about 1,000 giant pandas are left in the wild. All of these live a small area in the bamboo forests of China. There are about 150 live in **captivity**. This is why the giant panda is one of the most severely **endangered** species in the world.

How big are pandas?

Giant pandas are about the size of a black bear. When they are standing on all four legs, giant pandas are about 1 metre tall at the shoulder. Males are usually larger than females. Males can weigh 115 kg or more in the wild.

The 6th Finger: The giant panda has five fingers plus a "thumb," which isn't a real thumb but a kind of bone that allows the panda to grasp bamboo.

Is the panda dangerous?

The panda is thought of as quiet, gentle and harmless, but the giant panda can be as dangerous as any other bear when *provoked*. It has been known to attack humans on occasion.

Fast Facts

Type: Mammal

Diet: Bamboo shoots and roots

Average life span in the wild: 20 years

Size: 1.2 to 1.5 m

Weight: 136 kg

Protection status: Endangered

Major Threats: Habitat loss, poaching and human encroachment

Habitat: Mountainous regions where bamboo is present

Location: Central China



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