
GIANT PANDA 98 Fact Sheet (9/1/98)

Giant Panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*)

Description: The giant panda is a large (100 kg or 220 lbs.) carnivore, having white pelage with short rounded black ears, a black saddle across its back, black eye patches, and black fore and hind limbs. Body shape is bear-like. It has a short tail, a flattened muzzle, and a large, circum-anal scent gland used in marking.

Range: Mountain ranges in the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu in Western China.

Habitat: Mixed deciduous/evergreen montane temperate forest, with bamboo/rhododendron understory, between 3,000-10,000 feet altitude.

Diet: Between 90-99% bamboo, including leaves, shoots, and stems mainly of the arrow and umbrella species: occasional feeding on small fauna and other types of vegetation.

Social Organization: Basically solitary, although pandas are members of a community in which males and females are familiar with each other and interact occasionally. Females ovulate once a year, in the spring, and give birth in late summer and early fall. Twinning is common but only one offspring survives. Offsprings are extremely small and altricial at birth, and remain with the mother to about 18 months of age.

Conservation Status: Extremely endangered, with estimates of 1,000 surviving (based on census data from the 1980's), in very fragmented and isolated islands of habitat. The Panda is listed as an Appendix I species in CITES.

Threats to Survival: Mainly deforestation, agricultural encroachment, and poaching. Although a number of pandas were captured or "rescued" from the wild in past years, the number appears to have diminished recently and may be limited to actual cases of starving, injured and sick individuals.

Zoo Programs -- SSP: About 100 pandas live in Chinese facilities, and another 15 or so in zoos outside of China. Since 1990, births have occurred only in China, but the Chinese population is not self-sustaining. The SSP population currently consists of a breeding-age pair in San Diego and an elderly male at the National Zoo. The SSP is fostering research in North America and Mexico, and in zoos in China, and has cooperated with

the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group in fostering workshops and biomedical surveys. It is anticipated that one or two zoos will obtain pandas on loan from China during 1999. The San Diego and Atlanta zoos have brought personnel from captive facilities in China to the US for training in management.

Conservation (In Situ): A re-census of the wild population and satellite mapping of remaining habitat are highest priorities. Breeding loans to the US are beginning to produce funds for implementation of programs to enhance panda reserves in China, including establishment of critical infrastructure. The AZA giant panda advisory group is seeking ways to invest in in situ conservation activities. The World Wildlife Fund has supported research and training of Chinese personnel for many years, and is currently undertaking satellite mapping on one reserve. Over \$50 million is needed to implement China's plan for establishing and enhancing reserves.

Education: The giant panda is the international symbol of endangered species, but as yet little is known about the biology of pandas or their status in the wild. Development of educational programs, both within and outside China, are a high priority for the AZA and for the giant panda SSP.

Reintroduction: A workshop on reintroduction held in Chengdu, China, in 1997, recommended against reintroductionís at this time, except for rescued animals that can be returned quickly to wild habitat. The Oolong Breeding Center and the Giant Panda Research Base (Chengdu) are eager to move ahead with planning for reintroduction, but have not yet achieved sufficient success in captive breeding to produce a surplus for that purpose. Nor is it known, until a recensus of the wild population is completed, if suitable release sites are available.

SSP Coordinator: Dr. Donald G. Lindburg

Zoological Society of San Diego

San Diego, CA 92112-0551

Phone (619) 557-3949

Fax (619) 557-3959

E-mail: dlinzburg@sandiegozoo.org

David Towne

Woodland Park Zoo

5500 Phinney Ave. N.

Seattle, WA 98103-5897

Phone (206) 684-4881

Fax (206) 684-4854

rev. 9/98

©2000 [American Zoo and Aquarium Association](#)