



# Giant Pandas

A

Common name  
Giant Panda (En);  
Panda Géant (Fr);  
Panda gigante (Sp);

Aa

scientific name  
*Ailuropoda  
melanoleuca*



habitat  
Temperate Broadleaf  
and Mixed Forests of  
Southwest China  
[read more](#)



status  
Endangered (IUCN  
3.1)  
[read more](#)



population  
1,600 in the wild  
(2004)  
[read more](#)



did you know?  
That the panda cub  
is 1/900th the size of  
its mother  
[read more](#)



height  
Upto 150cm for  
adults  
[read more](#)



weight  
100 to 150 kg  
[read more](#)

The giant panda is globally recognized as a symbol of the beauty of nature and the importance of conservation. Yet the panda's future is uncertain, as its mountainous forest habitat dwindles with the rapid construction of roads and railways, and as poaching remains an ever-present threat. Peaceful and mostly vegetarian, giant pandas are now confined to fragmented forest patches high in the mountains of southwestern China. These same mountains form the watershed for China's Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, whose basins are the economic heart of China and home to over 500 million people.

As China's economy continues its rapid development, it is more important than ever to conserve the forest home of the giant panda — not just to safeguard this well-loved species, but to maintain the subsistence fisheries, agriculture, and water resources essential for nearly 40 per cent of China's people.

## There is only one species of giant panda

A member of the bear family, the giant panda is the only species in its genus. The animals have the digestive system of a carnivore, but have adapted to a vegetarian diet and depend almost exclusively on bamboo as a food source. The most recent study of giant pandas and their habitat, coordinated by the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of China and WWF, revealed an estimated 1,600 pandas in the six mountain ranges of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu provinces.



## Threats

Infrastructure development, mass tourism, and climate change threaten the long-term survival of this treasured but endangered species.



### Habitat loss

Giant pandas were once widespread in southern and eastern China and in neighboring Myanmar and north Vietnam. Today, habitat fragmentation separates at least 18 panda subpopulations. Many are isolated in narrow belts of bamboo less than a mile wide, reducing the prospects that a healthy and viable panda population. The existing network of nature reserves dedicated to protecting pandas covers approximately half of the panda's habitat and about 75 percent of its population.

The remaining forest habitat, while not under formal protection, is critical to the panda's survival. However, pressure from relentless economic growth and infrastructure development continues to degrade and undermine those forests.

### Illegal trade

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were a number of cases of panda poaching, but this has declined due to strict laws and greater public awareness of the panda's protected status. However some poaching still occurs, with several panda pelts on sale for large sums of money being confiscated in recent years. There is little information about the dynamics and dimensions of this market, but even at low levels poaching can have grave consequences for such an endangered species. Pandas are also unintentionally injured or killed in illegal traps and snares set for other animals, such as musk deer and black bears.

### Bamboo 'die-back'

Bamboo die-back is a natural phenomenon, occurring every 15–120 years depending on the type of bamboo. Once the bamboo dies it can take a year to regenerate from seed and as long as 20 years before the new plants can support a giant panda population. Bamboo die-back may have helped to disperse giant pandas in the past, as individuals migrated to seek areas with other species of bamboo. However, human settlements now form a barrier against giant panda movements, and prevent the animals from finding areas where bamboo is still plentiful.



Abating these threats requires a thorough understanding of the problems, the ability to develop realistic and workable strategies, and the capacity to implement these strategies on the ground.



## Our work on the ground

WWF has a 30-year history in China and a strong presence in critical panda areas.



We are responding to these mounting threats to giant pandas by reconnecting fragmented habitat and restoring some of the most important panda migration corridors. As a result, isolated and vulnerable panda populations will have more access to larger and healthier populations, ensuring a vital and more resilient gene pool for the long-term health of remaining pandas.

These improvements will also enable pandas to move between mountain forests, providing more mobility and opportunities for survival in the context of a changing, uncertain climate. WWF is also working to sustain our efforts by ensuring that local communities meet their own needs while simultaneously managing their impact on wildlife and forest resources.



### **Working with partners, WWF has achieved the following milestones:**

- established a core panda conservation network consisting of 62 nature reserves, including the Wolong Nature Reserve, one of the earliest and most well-known reserves dedicated to panda conservation;
- identified and helped restore and conserve key migration corridors and promote sustainable forest management to augment viable panda habitat;
- created a panda monitoring and patrolling system encompassing all panda landscapes to better understand the dynamics of panda populations;
- promoted alternative livelihoods and rural energy solutions among local communities to relieve the pressure on panda habitats; and,
- supported government agencies to use the best panda science available to inform policies favorable for panda protection.

WWF has also promoted the giant panda as an icon for the Yangtze River Basin to help serve as ambassador for the wider importance and fundamental linkages between species, people, and environmental health and human well-being.

WWF's iconic panda logo is emblematic of our longstanding commitment to conserving pandas in the wild. WWF has pursued a variety of proven strategies that aim to increase the panda's chances for survival, including reconnecting fragmented habitat in key panda areas and restoring the natural habitat of some of the most important panda migration corridors. We continue to build on a successful livelihoods program to help local communities sustainably meet their own needs while simultaneously reducing their effects on pandas, other wildlife, and forest resources.