



GIANT PANDA

The giant panda is universally admired for its distinctive eyes and seemingly gentle demeanour. They are also the most threatened species of bear.

Read on to discover more interesting facts about them.



Where they live

Giant pandas inhabit temperate montane forests in south-western China. There are around 1,860 giant pandas in the wild. They are classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List having recently been up listed from endangered following decades of conservation work that's now seeing a rise in their wild population numbers.
wwf.org.uk/wildlife/giant_panda/



CHARACTERISTICS

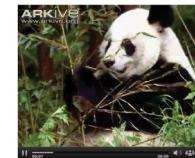
- They have a larger head and shorter legs than most bears. They have a distinctive black and white coat, most of their body and belly are white, contrasting sharply with their black ears, black limbs and shoulders, and black patches over the eyes.
- They have large muscular jaws, while their teeth are wider and flatter than those of other bears, allowing them to grind bamboo.
- Weight: 75-125kg.
- Most of their time is spent eating and sleeping, but they can climb using muscular forearms. From 3-5 months of age, young pandas walk alongside their mothers but can occasionally be seen piggy backing too!

DID YOU KNOW

Giant pandas have a 'thumb', it's actually a modified wrist bone that enables them to grasp bamboo stalks.

FAMILY

The female giant panda usually gives birth to one, sometimes two cubs between August and September, although usually only one cub survives. As a cub, they are helpless after birth for the first few weeks of their life and their mother cares for them in a den located in the base of a hollow tree or in a cave. They remain dependent on their mother until around 18 months old. As an adult, they lead a solitary lifestyle, rarely meeting other pandas unless it's the mating season.



VIDEO Watch footage:

- youtube.com/watch?v=GRcihHbqo10
- youtube.com/watch?v=R_8JAU9n2SU
- youtube.com/watch?v=jQ2YHAM_tFQ
- arkive.org/giant-panda/ailuropoda-melanoleuca/video-06.html
- arkive.org/giant-panda/ailuropoda-melanoleuca/video-08a.html
- arkive.org/giant-panda/ailuropoda-melanoleuca/video-12c.html

FEEDING

- Their diet is extremely specialised, compared to other bears.
- They mainly eat bamboo, which makes up 99% of their diet but they are really an omnivore and can sometimes eat meat other predators leave!
- They have the digestive system of a carnivore and are only able to digest a small proportion of the bamboo they eat, so have to consume a great deal of food – about 39kg of bamboo shoots per day.

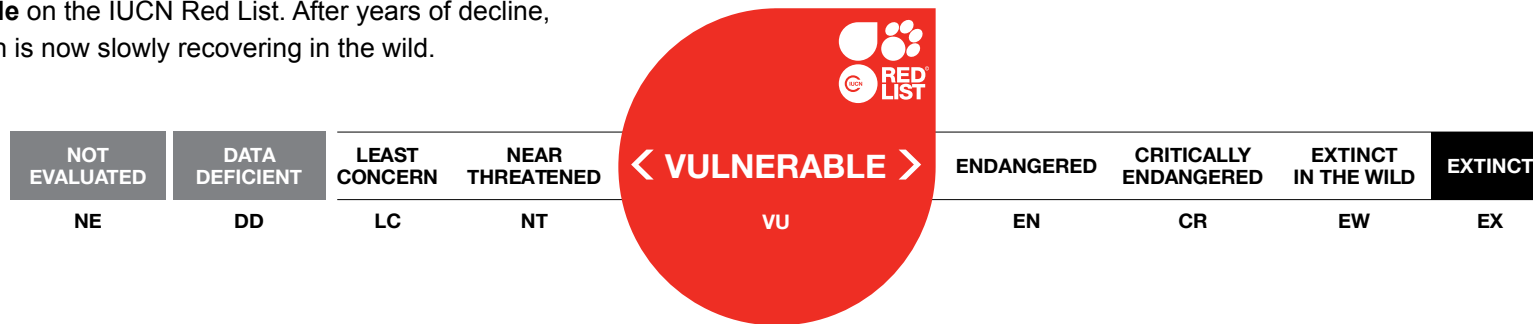


DID YOU KNOW

Although giant pandas are good swimmers and excellent tree climbers, they spend most of the time feeding - about 14 hours a day!

CLASSIFICATION

Classified as **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List. After years of decline, however, the population is now slowly recovering in the wild.



STATUS



Habitat loss is the greatest cause of the decline of their population. Large areas of China's natural forest have been cleared for agriculture, timber and firewood, to meet the needs of the large and growing human population.

Roads and railways are increasingly cutting through the forest, which isolates panda populations and prevents them from breeding and finding new sources of food.

Their habitat is also affected by livestock grazing and people collecting medicinal herbs and harvesting bamboo – their main source of food.

There are around 1,860 pandas remaining in the wild and conservation efforts seek to continue to grow this number.

Although poaching has been a problem in the past, the introduction of high penalties for poaching has reduced it to levels which are no longer believed to pose a significant threat to giant pandas.