



Pandas



YOUR FIELD REPORT

ISSUE 30





Hello!

Welcome to your latest giant panda update



Cai Qiong, former ranger, Shaanxi Guanyinshan National Nature Reserve

Hi! My name's Cai. I used to be a panda ranger in the Qinling mountains. I've met lots of giant pandas in my time – I even became known for seeing more of these black-and-white bears than anyone else at

the reserve. But nothing ever matched my first experience. I was in the forest when I heard rustling in the bamboo behind me. I turned round and found myself face-to-face with a giant panda! Time froze. Then the bear bolted, startling me so much I fell into a nearby stream! Soaked but thrilled, I was left with wet clothes and a memory I'll never forget. Turn over to read how my colleagues and WWF are helping pandas get a good start in life.

感谢您的支持!

(This means 'thanks for your support' in Mandarin!)

Pandas usually lead solitary lives. They're excellent tree climbers but spend most of their time on the forest floor, feeding on bamboo, which makes up 99% of their diet



A SAFE START

We're helping test a new way to protect precious panda cubs

For a giant panda, the first few weeks of life are critical. During this time, the security of the newborn's nursery can mean the difference between life and death. Mothers look for a place to give birth – a denning site – where their tiny, helpless cubs can grow in safety, protected from predators and the elements.

Natural tree hollows are ideal but, sadly, logging prior to a 1998 ban removed many of these vital safe spaces. Though we can plant new trees to restore

Wild pandas rely on hollow trees and rock caves for breeding dens

degraded areas, pandas need long-established forests – only large, mature trees have cavities that are roomy enough for a den. When old trees aren't available, expectant mothers will settle for a cave, but these aren't as good at protecting vulnerable newborns against the cold. We think the lack of suitable breeding dens could affect the growth of the panda population.

So we're testing a creative new solution: purpose-built panda dens. Drawing on research into the preferences of pregnant pandas, each wooden 'cave' features a

narrow entrance and a roomy chamber. The location is important – fragile cubs need constant care, so the den needs to be near water and bamboo, so mum doesn't have to leave her tiny, hairless offspring alone for long when she needs to eat. With our local partners we've set up 20 of these artificial dens in Dujiangyan, a protected area in China's Giant Panda National Park.

House hunting

The question is, do these new dens earn the pandas' seal of approval? Encouragingly, our camera traps have captured curious pandas inspecting the dens.

One mother was even spotted patting the doorframe – was she checking its sturdiness?

While we're still waiting for our first panda mother to move in, the bears' interest shows we're on the right track. We'll keep fine-tuning the design until they're panda-perfect, ensuring future generations have the best start in life. Thank you.



Until their fur has grown, newborns are vulnerable to the elements. Sadly, many die despite their mother's care

WHOSE HOME?

Our artificial dens are popular with all kinds of forest residents. Here are some of the other visitors we've spotted...



SIBLING SQUABBLE
As their mother explored, two Asiatic black bear cubs playfought over a den. Who won? We're not quite sure!



WINTER WARMTH
On a snowy day, two takins (large, goat-like creatures) sheltered in a den, huddling together for warmth.

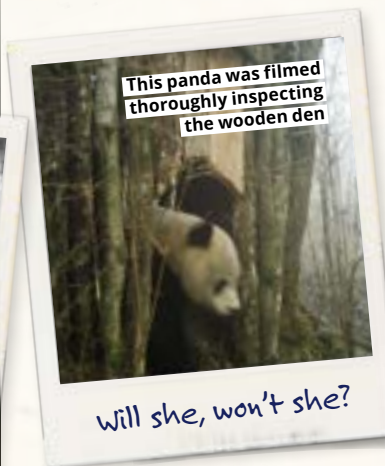


RAZZLE DAZZLE
For this male Temminck's tragopan (a pheasant), a den was the perfect stage to flaunt his courtship display.



A mother and her large cub head out

Home sweet home?



This panda was filmed thoroughly inspecting the wooden den

Will she, won't she?



FOREST LIFE

Giant pandas share their mountain home with many other rare animals. So protecting, restoring and connecting these landscapes is vital

Few creatures are as charismatic or distinctive as the giant panda – nor as important, culturally and ecologically. Found only in six mountain ranges in south-western China, the species is, thankfully, on the up after decades of conservation efforts. An estimated 1,864 now survive in the wild.

But this wonderful black-and-white bear isn't precious only in its own right. Known as an umbrella species, it's an ambassador for its astonishingly biodiverse habitat – an incredibly varied mix of forests at elevations of 1,200-3,400m. So work to conserve this icon – and the wider landscape it lives in – also helps protect a wealth of other rare and threatened animals.

Golden treasures

The Qinling mountain range, where we've long worked with local partners and communities, is home to species known locally as the 'four treasures': giant panda, takin, golden monkey and crested ibis.

The takin is the largest of these, and also the most curious looking. With its shaggy blonde pelt, it's been described as a cross between a yak and a golden retriever. It's actually related to goats, though more closely resembles a stocky wildebeest wearing a thick, shaggy coat.

Standing up to 1.4m at the shoulder and weighing as much as 350kg, takins form family groups of up to 20 individuals, eating leaves, grasses, bamboo shoots and flowers. The number of takins in the Qinling region has grown in recent years thanks to increased wildlife protection.

The long, flaxen winter coat of the golden monkey isn't the most memorable aspect of its appearance. Also found in the Minshan mountains and sometimes

known as the snub-nosed monkey, it has a face in shades of blue ranging from pale pastel to bright sky blue. Spotting a troop, sometimes numbering in the dozens or even hundreds, is exhilarating – though increasingly rare. The



The golden takin is an extraordinary animal that looks like it's been put together using body parts from other species

CORRIDOR
Restoring forests over roads helps connect groups of pandas via green 'corridors'

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Small populations of giant pandas have been isolated by infrastructure development and historical deforestation, as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes. This has prevented them from mixing and reproducing. That's why green corridors linking patches of forest are so vital.

In the Qinling mountains, two panda populations were separated by the construction of a large road. So for nearly two decades we've worked with local partners and communities to link these areas, planting over 133 hectares of bamboo, restoring forests and building ecoducts (animal-friendly tunnels) under the road.

Evidence – including poo and half-eaten bamboo stems – has shown that pandas are using the corridor. And camera-trap images have revealed the presence of a range of animals, including leopards and takins.



It's not just pandas that use ecoducts – takins (above) and leopards have also been seen



ECODUCT
Specially built tunnels enable wildlife to safely pass under roads

golden monkey is now endangered due to the loss of its montane forest habitat.

You'd also need luck to spot the white features, curved black bill and red face of the endangered crested ibis. By 1981, habitat loss and hunting had reduced its population to just seven birds known in the wild. Thankfully, conservation efforts brought the species back from the brink, and there are now thought to be around 7,700 in Shaanxi province.

In addition to the 'four treasures', the gleaming yellow and red plumage of a golden pheasant as it skitters across a mountain track is another striking

sight. Though not currently threatened, this bird's population is decreasing, again due to habitat loss (mostly caused by historic timber extraction), capture and hunting.

Cats and curiosities

Various other rare species have ranges overlapping with that of the giant panda. One is the acrobatic, endangered red panda, which isn't closely related despite the name, though it does munch bamboo in some of the same regions.

Camera trap surveys have also revealed the presence of several elusive

cats in panda landscapes, including leopards, golden cats and leopard cats. Even snow leopards – the 'ghosts of the mountains' – have been snapped on the same camera traps as pandas. Asiatic black bears join the roster of the region's carnivores.

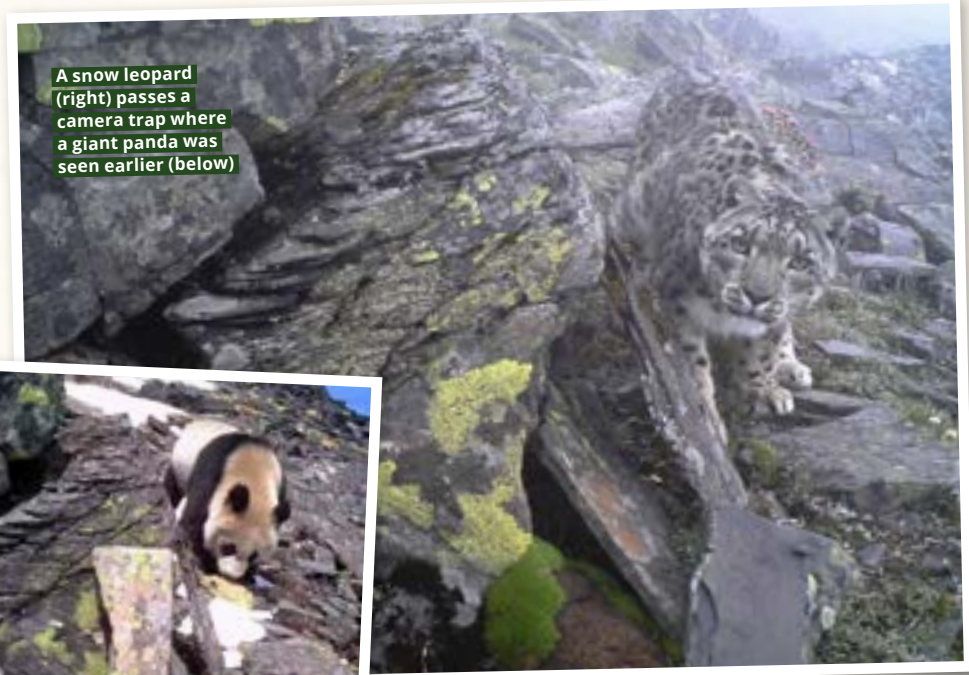
Perhaps the most unusual animal sharing the giant panda's habitat is the Chinese giant salamander, which lives in streams in the Qinling mountains. It can grow well over 1m

DID YOU KNOW?

The Qinling mountains are home to 126 species of mammals and 338 bird species, as well as more than 1,400 insect species.

long and weigh over 30kg. After many years of intensive hunting, numbers in the wild have plummeted, and this amazing creature is now critically endangered.

Many of the challenges facing giant pandas also threaten these animals. But with your help, we're fighting to protect the precious places that are home to them all. ■



A snow leopard (right) passes a camera trap where a giant panda was seen earlier (below)



A WORLD OF GOOD

Try a daily dose of nature to boost your mental and physical wellbeing

In fast-paced Hong Kong, many of us are living under constant pressure. Work, studies, family responsibilities and digital overload can take a real toll on both our emotional and physical wellbeing – particularly for young people growing up in an increasingly urban and screen-dominated environment.

Yet one of the most effective remedies lies closer than we think, often just beyond our doorsteps: nature.

How nature helps us feel better

An overwhelming body of evidence shows that connecting with nature is one of the best things we can do for our mental wellbeing. It helps us relax, lowers stress levels, boosts confidence, self-esteem and creativity, and helps us to find focus and emotional balance.

However, despite Hong Kong's rich biodiversity, stunning landscapes and easy access to country parks and beaches, recent studies show that Hong Kong people scored the lowest among 18 studied regions globally for the level of nature connectedness and well-being index.

While many people recognise that nature makes them feel better, busy urban lifestyles often leave little room to do so.

Let's reconnect with nature

At WWF, we believe that strengthening our connection with nature is essential – not only for our own wellbeing, but also for fostering greater care and action in protecting the natural world.

You don't need a long hike or a remote destination to make a difference. Spending just 20 minutes a day engaging with nature can make a massive difference to our mental wellbeing.

While spending time in the great outdoors is rewarding, you can also connect with nature when you're at home too – from growing herbs,

listening to birdsong, to enjoying images of nature to bring a sense of calm to your day.

The great news is that many of the powerful mood boosters are totally free – as long as we look after our world. Let's restore nature, and let nature restore us– as long as we look after our world. Let's restore nature, and let nature restore us.

GET YOUR DAILY DOSE OF NATURE

Take a moment each day to reconnect with the natural world around you – for your own wellbeing, and for the planet we all share.





Working to sustain the natural world for people and wildlife
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(Incorporated in Hong Kong with limited liability by guarantee 於香港註冊成立的擔保有限公司)

As well as helping to safeguard pandas, you support our other vital work to help protect our beautiful planet and its wildlife. Thank you.