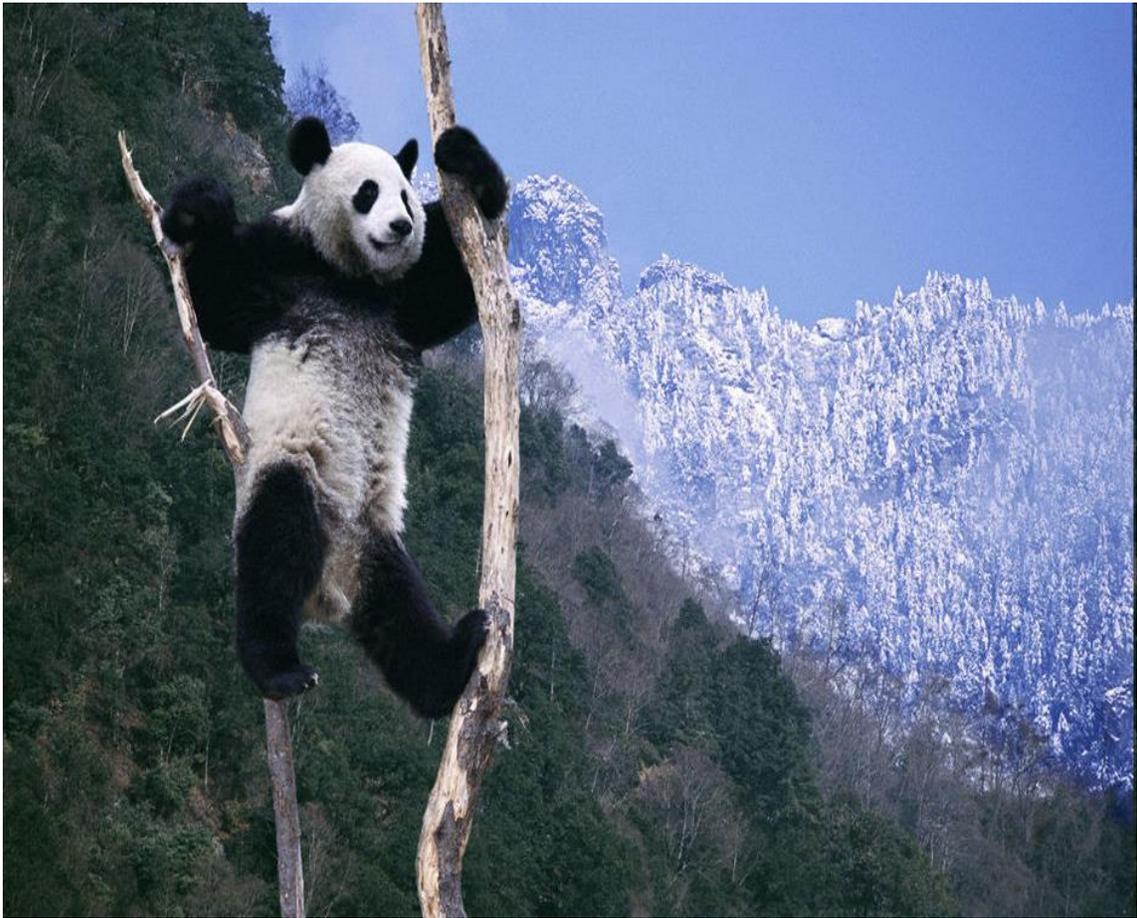


# Giant Pandas

## Entering the Danger Zone



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A Giant panda rumbling through bamboo, does not know what is ahead of it. Due to poaching and habitat loss, the world's most lovable creature is disappearing. A lot of illegal poaching continues with promises of big money. If we do not stop these poachers, like other creatures Giant Panda will soon become an animal of the past.

The Giant Panda is a spectacular sight to behold. The black and white fur of a panda helps it keep the heat in and the cold out. Under its black and white fur, there is black and pink skin. These marvelous bears weigh from two hundred fifty to three hundred pounds. When standing on its two hind legs, a male stands up to six feet tall. Females stand up to five feet tall. Somersaults and tree climbing are the favorite activities for these extremely flexible bears. A panda can also easily swim or paddle across a river. The main course for a panda is bamboo. Its flat molar teeth, powerful jaws and big cheek muscles are the ideal features the Giant Panda needs to munch on its lunch. The Giant Panda also has an extra large wrist bone or an "extra thumb" which it uses to grip the bamboo when eating. Even though a Giant Panda doesn't have very good eyesight, the wonderful sense of smell and hearing it possesses covers up for the eyesight. Pandas also have black fur on their ears and black eye patches. With so many fascinating and unique features, the panda has become a world-wide favorite.

A panda trudges through a scarce bamboo forest; not able to find a hollow fir tree to take nap. Pandas live in the mountainous forests of China. Shaanxi, Gansu and mainly Sichuan are the three provinces that pandas are now living in. The natural habitat of a Giant Panda is in the mountainous forests mostly in Sichuan. The habitat of a panda must consist of plentiful bamboo, a near by drinking source, many hollow fir trees and thick bushes. Panda habitats must also be damp and have dense mist throughout the year. Few pandas have been found living on the edge of the Tibetan Qinghai Plateau. The mountains inhabited by panda are five thousand to ten thousand feet in elevation. Villagers and farmers are cutting down the panda habitat to clear land for crops and will soon push the Giant Panda to extinction.

When you see a panda, you think of a typical bear; but these creatures are not what you think, they are more. Pandas usually live by themselves except when mating. One panda rarely crosses a path made by another panda and are most active at night. If a panda ever wants to communicate with another one of its kind, it can use eleven different calls. During the winter, pandas are a species of bears that do not hibernate. A panda takes its naps in many different places and usually does not come back to the same spot again. When a panda wants to warn another panda of its presence, it uses its scent glands to leave marks on trees and rocks. During mating season, females and males go in search of each other. If two males meet the same female at the same time, the males will wrestle until one gets defeated by the other. The winner of the two gets to have the female as its mate. Pandas are solitary animals and live in their own community.

A female panda gives birth to a baby panda. Baby pandas are usually born around August and September. Newborns are only as big as a stick of butter and are pink, hairy and weigh just over four ounces. Females give birth to two babies at a time; one is either abandoned or stillborn. In panda breeding centers, the second cub is kept alive. The newborn will get put in an incubator to be warm. The remaining offspring stays with the mother for one and a half to three years. Pandas give birth in hollow trees or dry caves. A baby panda opens its eyes when it is about two months old. When traveling, a cub will be carried about in the mouth of its mother so it will get attacked less easily. There are no natural predators of a Giant panda.

However, snow leopards, martens, weasels and wild dogs prey on baby pandas. When in captivity, a panda may live up to thirty-five years. Living in the wild, a panda may live up to twenty-five years. At the age of six, a panda can start to breed. The gestation period for a panda depends on how much it eats. If loggers do not stop cutting down the panda breeding area, there will soon never be such a thing as a baby panda.

The panda has a very simple food chain. Ninety-nine percent from the diet of a panda is bamboo. The other one percent is made up of dead meat, bark from fir trees, willow leaves, horsetails and wild parsnip. Pandas eat only the soft fiber in the bamboo stalks. If any dead carcass from another animal is left behind, a panda will eat it. Each day, one panda eats twenty-five to thirty pounds of bamboo. One stalk of bamboo can be eaten in less than a minute by a giant panda. In the springtime, one adult panda may eat up to one hundred pounds of bamboo a day. Since farmers are cutting the bamboo that keeps pandas on this earth, pandas may unfortunately lose their lives.

Chop, chop and chop. A logger is cutting down some trees. Loss of habitat, poaching and illegal capturing has pushed these bears onto the endangered species list. Before 1939, the panda was allowed to be hunted even though endangered. 1939 was the first year that the Chinese government took the panda into consideration as an endangered animal. Twenty pandas have been sold to other countries and one hundred and eighty have been taken out of the wild currently in Chinese zoos and reserves. This has been done to produce more babies. Only three thousand pandas are left in the world and two thousand still surviving the dangers of the wild. By farmers and villagers settling into the panda habitat, they are making it harder for these creatures to find their food. Bamboo die-outs have recently caused a big problem for many pandas that have been left starving and not able to move to another area. Conservationists are now asking for anybody who wants to help re-plant trees cut down by loggers and villagers. Another problem for these bears is getting trapped in musk deer snares set throughout the panda habitat. Illegal hunting and poaching still goes on even though it causes many problems. Most poaching happens because of desire for lush panda pelts as wall decor or as a rug. Desire for panda pelts around the world has put these beautiful and innocent animals in danger of extinction.

These furry and lovable creatures may soon freely roam through their kingdom of bamboo. However, if poaching and habitat loss continues, the Giant panda will never be safe again. It is up to humanity to save the Giant panda from extinction.