

Wild pandas munch in the mists of China

High in the rainy mountains of southwest China the Kid found one of the world's rarest mammals, the giant panda.

About 1,500 pandas live in the wild. Another 180 live in captivity, most in China's panda research reserves. China has loaned 11 pandas to zoos in the United States.

In China the panda is called "Xiongmao" which means Giant Cat Bear. Its scientific name is *Ailuropoda Melanoluca*.

Everyone recognizes the cute black and white pandas. Perhaps you own a stuffed panda bear.

The panda's white fur is accented with black eye patches, ears, legs, feet, chest, and shoulders. The thick, coarse fur feels oily to the touch. The oil forms a coating to protect pandas from the cool and damp climate where they live.

A newborn panda is the size of a chipmunk, about 3 to 4.5 ounces. Over the next five years, a panda grows quickly to over 200 pounds. An adult panda is about six feet long.

Pandas eat bamboo — a lot of bamboo. They munch 12 to 16 hours a day, eating 22 to 40 pounds of mature bamboo or 84 pounds of fresh bamboo shoots and leaves each day.

The pandas' molars are very broad and flat, which helps them crush the bamboo. They eat quickly and only digest about a fifth of what they eat. They hold the stems with their front paws, which have enlarged wrist bones that act as thumbs.

Pandas eat about 15 different varieties of bamboo. Bamboo goes through periodic die-offs, so pandas must have more than one variety nearby or they will starve.

Pandas once moved from one mountaintop to another to find food. But more and more people live in the valleys. Pandas are shy and don't like to mix with people. As the habitat gets smaller, pandas have been forced higher

Pandas in the USA

Can't go to China? You can visit pandas at zoos in San Diego, Memphis, Atlanta and Washington DC. Watch San Diego's four pandas via Panda Cam at www.sandiegozoo.org.



Little cutie! Su Lin was born at the San Diego Zoo on Aug. 2, 2005. Her name means "a little bit of something very cute."

Photograph by Ken Bohn, San Diego.
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up the mountains.

In 1984 the panda joined the list of endangered species. Those who poach pandas can receive a life sentence in China. The government has set aside about half the remaining panda habitat in panda reserves.

In April, a panda born and raised in captivity returned to the wild. Chinese scientists gave four-year-old Xiang Xiang survival training to teach him how to live on his own.

With research, habitat preservation and protection from hunters, wild pandas should continue to munch in the mist.

Find these words: Bamboo, Chew, China, Climate, Cub, Extinct, Food, Fur, Habitat, Humans, Live, Moonbear, Mountain, Pacific, Panda, Paw, Rain, Tibet

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