

Wild nights with moon bears

Do moon bears stroll in the moonlight?

Let's hop an airplane to China to find a moon bear on our Wild World Safari. An 18-hour flight takes us across the Pacific Ocean to China in Eastern Asia.

About 1.3 billion people (one fifth of the world's population) live in China. The capital is Beijing.

China is the world's fourth largest country in land area, with about 3.7 million square miles (almost 10 million square kilometers).

The climate varies from tropical areas in the south to sub arctic areas in the north. The eastern coast has lush deltas. The western area has the Gobi Desert and other desert areas. China has mountains, high plateaus, and hills.

The world's tallest mountain, Mount Everest, is found in the Tibet area of China. We also find moon bears in Tibet and other forested mountain areas in Southeast Asia.

Moon bears get their name from the large white crescent moon shape on their chest. They are also known as Asiatic black bears.

A moon bear spends most of its time in trees to avoid predators and humans. Its nest looks like a very large bird nest.

The nocturnal bear sleeps most of the day. It wakes up at dusk to hunt for food. Moon bears prefer meat but will also eat plants and insects.

Moon bears are very strong and live about 25 to 30 years. Adult females weigh about 200 to 225 pounds, about the same as a large adult person. However, large males can reach 400 pounds.

How would you like to run into a 400-pound moon bear in the moonlight? Actually, their strength and size puts moon bears in danger.

As the world population grows, people move into areas where wild animals live. That limits the areas where animals can be safe.

People and bears do not live well together. People are afraid of the bears because they are so strong. Farmers do not like moon bears because they eat farm animals. Local governments encourage hunting the bears.

Experts fear the bears may become extinct if hunting continues.

But there's another danger to moon bears.

Traditional Chinese medicine uses bear bile for healing and pain relief. Bears have been killed for thousands of years for their bile and other parts.

Now, the bears are trapped and kept in small cages on farms. Bear farmers gather and sell the bile. About 7,000 moon bears are held captive on bear farms.

In January 2006, the European Union asked China to end bear farming, calling it "cruel and uncivilized."

Caged bears can't take a walk in the moonlight.



Largest Countries

Which countries do you think are the largest in the world? Test your knowledge by ranking these countries from 1 to 5.

By Population

- United States
- Indonesia
- India
- China
- European Union

By Land Size

- United States
- China
- Brazil
- Russia
- Canada



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- Clip out this article and put it in your safari travel journal.
- Find China on a map or globe.
- Find an article in the newspaper about something in your community you might want to do in this week.