



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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NEW PANDA IMPORTATION POLICY PROPOSED, PUBLIC COMMENTS SOUGHT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing a proposed policy that would guide future imports of giant pandas into the United States for scientific research and captive-breeding. The proposed measure seeks to ensure that any imports contribute to the survival of the species in the wild.

There are believed to be fewer than 1,000 giant pandas remaining in the wild. These animals are found in many fragmented populations with only a few colonies numbering more than 50 pandas. In addition, there are fewer than 100 pandas currently in captivity. Pandas are listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The only panda in the United States resides at the National Zoo in Washington, DC.

A temporary moratorium on all new panda import permit applications has been in effect since December 20, 1993. However, this moratorium did not apply to applications already under review when the action was announced. If adopted, the new policy would clarify existing regulations and supersede any previous policies.

"The United States, China, and the international conservation community are strongly committed to a coordinated panda conservation effort," said George T. Frampton, Jr., Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "The time is now to pool our knowledge and work together to save these beautiful animals."

In March 1991, the Service published a policy for the issuance of giant panda import permits for temporary exhibition loans. By the late 1980s, it appeared a growing demand for temporary loans of giant pandas posed additional threats to both wild and captive populations. In 1988, the Service received information that as many as 30 institutions may have been negotiating, or planning to negotiate, with various entities in China to arrange panda loans.

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Recently, the Service began receiving import permit applications based on scientific research and/or captive breeding purposes as well as for temporary exhibition loans. However, existing policy did not address these additional types of loans. The Service was also concerned that its policy for temporary exhibition loans might need reevaluation. Because the agency felt a re-examination of the long-range implications of panda imports for such purposes was necessary to ensure the conservation needs of the species, it announced the 1993 suspension of import permits until a new policy could be formulated.

Under the proposed policy, no import permits would be issued for animals intentionally removed from the wild. All import permit applications must support high-priority panda conservation projects in China and be coordinated with that country's captive-breeding plan. Applicants must also give assurances they will participate in international conservation efforts.

The Service is also proposing two alternatives concerning temporary exhibition loans. The first would prohibit the importation of pandas solely for exhibition. Public display would be permitted only as part of an approved captive-breeding and/or scientific research program and only if such exhibition does not interfere with those activities. The second alternative retains temporary exhibition loans under certain limited conditions. The agency is seeking public comment on both alternatives.

In addition to outlining a new policy, the proposal defines the parameters under which the Service would make its findings on panda import applications. Before any import permit is approved, the application must meet specific requirements of both the Endangered Species Act and CITES. Under the Act, the importation must be for scientific purposes or to enhance the propagation or survival of the species in a manner consistent with the purposes and policies of the Act. In addition, the Act requires that the issuance of any import permit would not be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

Issuance of an import permit under CITES is contingent upon findings that the proposed importation would not be detrimental to the survival of the species, the importation would not be for primarily commercial purposes, and the permit applicant is able to suitably house and care for the animals.

A major focus of the proposed policy, which will impact all future permit decisions, is the status of captive breeding in China and the need for coordinated international breeding

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efforts. The continued decline of the wild population of giant pandas due to increasing habitat fragmentation and poaching makes it imperative to establish a self-sustaining genetically diverse captive population. This could provide much-needed insurance against a catastrophic loss of wild populations.

The Service recognizes that reintroduction of captive-bred pandas to the wild may be necessary in the future. A long-term goal, reintroduction efforts would be contingent upon the success of a self-sustaining captive-born population, the availability of adequate and secure habitat, and a coordinated international conservation plan.

Because of the precarious situation of the panda population in China, it is vital that research findings are shared quickly with all concerned entities and, most importantly, that China has the best available data. Therefore, the proposed policy stipulates that research priorities should be developed in concert with the international conservation community.

The Service continues to be concerned about the removal of pandas from the wild. In the past, it has been suggested that giant pandas were removed from the wild without sufficient reason and that international demand for captive giant pandas may have provided the incentive to do so. If this proposed policy is adopted, the Service generally would not consider any importation of pandas taken from the wild after December 31, 1986, unless the circumstances of removal were in the best interests of the individual animal and clearly conformed to Chinese regulations. Since 1986, the Chinese have established stringent restrictions on the removal of pandas from the wild.

The Service also proposes that import permit applications for scientific research clearly demonstrate how that research would contribute to the conservation of the panda in the wild and in captivity. Captive breeding loans would need to benefit panda conservation by supplementing the breeding program in China to help achieve a self-sustaining captive population. In the case of both scientific research and captive-breeding applications, if the panda would also be on exhibition, the applicant must submit a monitoring plan to ensure that such display would not interfere with the reason for which the permit was approved.

The Service continues to emphasize that, in order to be approved, any project must demonstrate a commitment to giant panda conservation efforts in China. As part of its proposed policy, the Service would require that at least 80 percent of the profits generated from any panda loan be used in China to fund *in situ* projects.

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The proposed policy is published in today's Federal Register. The Service will consider public comments for 60 days from the date of publication. Comments may be submitted to the Office of Management Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 420(c), Arlington, Virginia 22203.

For further information, contact Kenneth B. Stansell, Office of Management Authority, at the above address, by telephone (703-358-2093), or by fax (703-358-2280).

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ENDANGERED SPECIES

This Species is Protected Under the Endangered Species Act of 1973

GIANT PANDA

Ailuropoda melanoleuca



What animal is black and white and loved all over the world? If you guessed the giant panda, you're right! The giant panda is also known as the panda bear, bamboo bear, or in Chinese as *Daxiongmao*, the "large bear cat." In fact, its scientific name means "black and white cat-footed animal."

Giant pandas are found only in the mountains of central China—in small isolated areas of the north and central portions of the Sichuan Province, in the mountains bordering the southernmost part of Gansu Province, and in the Qinling Mountains of the Shaanxi Province.

Giant pandas live in dense bamboo and coniferous forests at altitudes of 5,000 to 10,000 feet. The mountains are shrouded in heavy clouds with torrential rains or dense mist throughout the year.

Ancestors of the giant panda existed in the mid-Miocene Era (about 3 million years ago), when their geographic range extended throughout southern China. Fossil remains also have been found in present-day Burma and Vietnam.

Giant pandas are bear-like in shape with striking black and white markings. The ears, eye patches, legs, and shoulder band are black; the rest of the body is whitish. They have a thick, woolly coat to insulate them from the cold. Adults are 4 to 6 feet long and may weigh up to 350 pounds—about the same size as the American black bear. However, unlike the black bear, giant pandas do not hibernate and cannot walk on their hind legs.

The giant panda has unique front paws—one of the wrist bones is enlarged and elongated and is used like

a thumb, enabling the giant panda to grasp stalks of bamboo. They also have very powerful jaws and teeth to crush bamboo. While bamboo stalks and roots make up about 95 percent of its diet, the giant panda also feeds on gentians, irises, crocuses, fish, and occasionally small rodents. It must eat 20 to 40 pounds of food each day to survive, and spends 10 to 16 hours a day feeding.

The giant panda reaches breeding maturity between 4 and 10 years of age. Mating usually takes place in the spring, and 3 to 5 months later, one or two cubs weighing 3 to 5 ounces each is born in a sheltered den. Usually only one cub survives. The eyes open at 1½ to 2 months and the cub becomes mobile at approximately 3 months of age. At 12 months the cub becomes totally independent. While their average lifespan in the wild is about 15 years, giant pandas in captivity have been known to live into their 20s.



Scientists have debated for more than a century whether giant pandas belong to the bear family, the raccoon family, or a separate family of their own. This is because the giant panda and its cousin, the lesser or red panda, share many characteristics with both bears and raccoons. Recent DNA analysis indicates that giant pandas are more closely related to bears and red pandas are more closely related to raccoons.

In 1869, a French missionary and naturalist named Pere Armand David was the first European to describe the giant panda. In 1936, clothing designer Ruth Harkness brought the first live giant panda, named Su-Lin, out of China and to the West. Su-Lin lived at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and was a celebrity until he died in 1938. Today, more than 100 giant pandas are found in Chinese zoos, and several others are housed in North Korean zoos. Only about 15 giant pandas live in zoos outside of China and North Korea. In 1980, the first giant panda birth outside China occurred at the Mexico City Zoo.

Until recently, Washington, DC's National Zoo housed Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, perhaps the most well-known giant pandas in North America. A gift from the People's Republic of China to the people of the United States, they were presented as a gesture of amity and goodwill to President Richard Nixon when he visited China in 1972.

Ling-Ling, at age 23, died in December 1992.

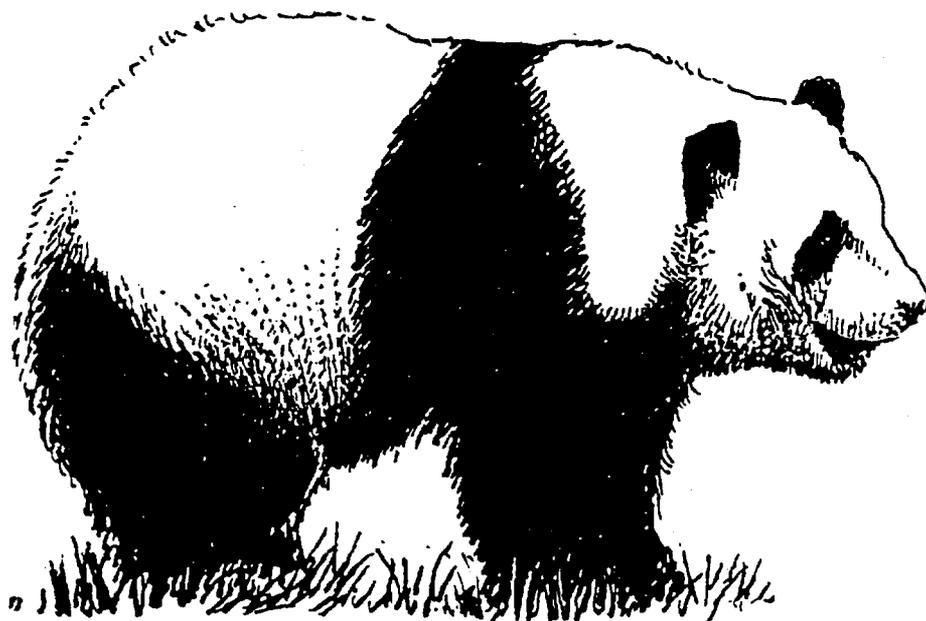
Giant pandas are bear-like in shape with black ears, eye patches, legs, and shoulder bands and whitish coloring on the rest of the body.

Giant pandas are among the rarest mammals in the world—there are probably fewer than 1,000 left in the wild. Although adult giant pandas have few natural enemies, the young are sometimes preyed upon by leopards.

Habitat encroachment and destruction are the greatest threats to the continued existence of the giant panda. This is mainly because of the demand for land and natural resources by China's 1 billion inhabitants. To offset



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One of the rarest mammals in the world, there are probably fewer than 1,000 giant pandas remaining in the wild. Habitat encroachment and destruction as well as illegal killing are the main causes for the giant panda's decline.

this situation, the Chinese government has set aside 11 nature preserves where bamboo flourishes and giant pandas are known to live.

Giant pandas are also susceptible to *poaching*, or illegal killing, as their dense fur carries a high price in illegal markets of the Far East. The Chinese government has imposed life-in-prison sentences for those convicted of poaching giant pandas.

The low reproductive capacity of the giant panda makes it more vulnerable to these threats, and less capable of rebounding from its low numbers.

In 1984, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the giant panda as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act, meaning the animal is considered in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. This protection also prohibits giant pandas from being imported into the U.S. except under certain conditions.

The giant panda is also protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a treaty among more than 120 nations aimed at controlling illegal trade in endangered animal and plant species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the federal



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agency responsible for the U.S. government's compliance with CITES.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently developing a policy for the importation of giant pandas for scientific research, education via zoological display, and a long-term international breeding program. This policy is expected to go into effect in 1995. Many U.S. zoos support giant panda conservation efforts in China.

Scientists continue to study ways to improve breeding success in captivity and increase wild giant panda populations in order to ensure their continued survival.

Illustrations by Robert Savannah

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