

Name: _____

Giant Pandas

by Guy Belleranti

Black and white giant pandas are much loved in their native China and around the rest of the world.

Sadly, they're also a very endangered animal. Much of their forest habitat has been cleared for farms, roads, railroads, and other development. The 1,500 giant pandas still in the wild are restricted to cool, damp mountain heights

containing bamboo and old growth forest. These forests have the hollow logs and stumps pandas need for dens and shelter.



At one time, scientists thought giant pandas' closest relatives might be raccoons. However, DNA tests show pandas are a species of bear.

When giant pandas aren't sleeping, they're searching for food and eating. In fact, they spend 12 hours a day eating! What do they eat? The bamboo in the forests, and a lot of it – 25 to 40 pounds (11 to 18 kg) every day! Giant pandas must eat more than one kind of bamboo because the plants are low in nutrients. They will eat other plants, and even meat occasionally, but bamboo makes up 99% of their diet.

Giant pandas eat by gripping bamboo stems in their front paws and sitting upright, kind of like a person. Each paw's grip is aided by an extra long flesh-covered wrist bone that acts like a thumb.

Most of the time giant pandas are loners. However, when they come together, they're the most vocal of all bears. They bleat, bark, huff, and growl during their very short breeding season. Cubs squeal and croak when they're with their mothers.



Pandas also communicate by leaving scent markings from glands under their tails. Males find breeding females by scent. Males also sometimes do "hand stands" so they can leave their scent higher up a tree.

Giant panda mothers give birth to one, or sometimes two, tiny cubs. If two cubs are born, only the stronger cub usually survives. Males do not help with the care. The cubs are mostly hairless and only weigh $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pound (.11 kg). That's 800 times smaller than its 200

pound (90 kg) mother!

Giant panda cubs don't fully open their eyes until they are six to eight weeks old. They don't begin to crawl until ten weeks. They remain with their mothers for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years.

An important thing to know about pandas is that they are not closely related to the bamboo-eating, raccoon-sized red panda. They are quite a unique species! In fact, each panda's markings are slightly different from all other pandas.

About the Author



Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. In the box below, circle the words that describe a giant panda's natural habitat.

tropical	high altitude	sand dunes	mountainous
forested	extremely dry	arctic	grasslands

2. Why do giant pandas spend so much time eating?

3. Which of the following animals is the giant panda most closely related to?

- | | |
|-----------------|------------|
| a. red panda | b. raccoon |
| c. grizzly bear | d. badger |

4. Put a check mark (☒) next to each of the ways a male giant panda might attract a female mate.

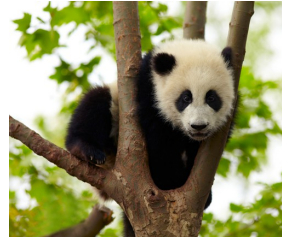
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male pandas rub against trees to leave their scent. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male pandas fight other males in front of the females to impress them. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male pandas walk in circles around female pandas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Male pandas do "hand stands" to leave their mark higher in the trees. |

5. If a mother giant panda gives birth to two cubs, will they both be with her a year later? Explain why or why not.

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Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ____ e ____ ____ r i ____ t e ____

hint: limited or confined to a certain area

2. ____ a ____ b ____ ____

hint: a very tall, wood-like grass that pandas eat

3. ____ r i ____ ____ i n g

hint: holding tightly

4. ____ a ____ ____ o o ____

hint: an American mammal with a mask-like face

5. ____ a ____ i ____ a ____

hint: the natural environment an animal lives in

6. ____ a ____ ____ i n ____ s

hint: patterns on an animal's fur or skin that distinguish it from other animals

7. ____ o ____ a ____

hint: loud; expressive

8. ____ o ____ ____ o ____

hint: empty on the inside

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In the article, “Giant Pandas,” you learned that pandas live in a very restricted mountainous habitat in China, where they can find the bamboo that makes up 99% of their diet. In fact, there are only around 1,500 giant pandas left in the wild.

Why do you think there are so few pandas left in the wild? Is there anything that humans can do to help the giant panda population in the wild increase? Use the information in the article and your own ideas to answer the questions.

[illegible]

ANSWER KEY

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tropical	high altitude	sand dunes	mountainous
forested	extremely dry	arctic	grasslands

2. Why do giant pandas spend so much time eating?

The bamboo giant pandas eat doesn't contain many nutrients, so they must eat a lot of it.

3. Which of the following animals is the giant panda most closely related to? c.

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5. If a mother giant panda gives birth to two cubs, will they both be with her a year later? Explain why or why not.

No, likely not. If two cubs are born, usually only the stronger cub will survive.

ANSWER KEY

Giant Pandas

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Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. r e s t r i c t e d restricted
hint: limited or confined to a certain area
2. b a m b o o bamboo
hint: a very tall, wood-like grass that pandas eat
3. g r i p p i n g gripping
hint: holding tightly
4. r a c c o o n raccoon
hint: an American mammal with a mask-like face
5. h a b i t a t habitat
hint: the natural environment an animal lives in
6. m a r k i n g s markings
hint: patterns on an animal's fur or skin that distinguish it from other animals
7. v o c a l vocal
hint: loud; expressive
8. h o l l o w hollow
hint: empty on the inside