

# Frequently Asked Questions

**What is endangered?** A species is endangered when its population becomes so small there is the danger of extinction. Realizing the value of wildlife, many countries have special laws for endangered species including hunting bans and habitat protection.

**What is extinction?** Extinction is when a species no longer exists. The usual reason a species becomes endangered is the destruction of its natural habitat so that migration and mating patterns are disrupted and normal food supplies are diminished. In many cases, uncontrolled and illegal hunting or "poaching" have contributed to the problem.

**Are Giant Pandas endangered?** Yes, Giant Pandas were classified as an endangered species in the 1980s, and are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Animals. The United States' Endangered Species Act protects the Giant Panda, as does the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

**Why Are Giant Pandas endangered?** They're endangered primarily due to either loss or fragmentation of their habitat. With Giant Pandas, there are additional challenges with mating success, digestive illnesses, and maintaining a reliable and plentiful food supply. For example, in addition to the occasional "die off" of bamboo, the main food source for the Giant Panda, the catastrophic earthquake of 2008 severely damaged both habitat and food supply.

**What is habitat?** Habitat is the environment or ecosystem where an animal lives. The Giant Panda's habitat was once widespread over southern and eastern China, Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma), but their habitat has been greatly reduced over time. Today their habitat is limited to the mountains in only a few provinces of southwestern China. Most are in the Sichuan Province, but they are also found in Shaanxi and Gansu Provinces. Their range is along the eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau.

**How many Giant Pandas are there in the world today?** The current estimate is only about 1,600 pandas in the wild.

**How many Giant Pandas live in captivity (zoos, wildlife preserves, etc.)?** There are approximately 200 pandas in captivity.

**What is the role of zoos in helping Giant Pandas?** One of the greatest benefits zoos offer is increasing public awareness about the plight of the Giant Panda.

**What is China or other countries doing to protect Giant Pandas?** In the 1940's, the Chinese government began conservation efforts to protect the Giant Pandas. In 1963, the China Research & Conservation Center for the Giant Panda at the Wolong Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, was established. Today there are a total of 40 panda reserves across southwestern China. These reserves protect not only the Giant Pandas, but the entire ecosystem including the red panda, the golden monkeys, takin (a goat like animal) and many other smaller species.

**Are Giant Pandas still being killed by people?** Since the Chinese government has instituted strict laws protecting the Giant Panda, poaching has become very rare. However, with people moving deeper and deeper into the pandas' territories and clearing away the much needed bamboo, people are the direct cause of the panda's declining numbers. Not only is the loss of their food source a critical problem but the fragmentation of their habitat has also made it increasingly difficult for Giant Pandas to find mating partners. Because human activity has created pockets of habitat for the wild pandas, they are essentially living in isolated "islands" that prevent them from roaming and mingling with other Giant Pandas.

**What are some of the main things that pandas need to survive?** Protection of their habitat and food source is critical. In addition, continued research on reducing digestive illness and perfecting breeding success is an important part in saving the Giant Panda.

**Did the earthquake in China in 2008 harm the pandas?** The full impact of the 2008 earthquake is still being assessed. We do know that one panda died in the earthquake; one is missing and presumed dead; one who needed medical care died because the roads were impassable at the time; the Wolong Center was damaged beyond repair and is being rebuilt; and, the bamboo forest was crushed under mountainous landslides of rock and

mud. A report by the Chinese Academy of Sciences released in July 2009, found that in the area studied about 25% of the habitat was "bare ground."

**Why save the Giant Panda?** Pandas have survived for centuries, even surviving the ice age; so it would be tragic if they became extinct now during our lifetime and be known only through books and museums. We know that the decline of the Giant Panda is not part of the "natural process," but is due primarily to habitat destruction. Since humans are responsible for the disruption, humans should be socially responsible and attempt to save them from extinction. Most importantly, there is interdependence among all living creatures and their habitats. Healthy plants and animal species are the foundation for healthy ecosystems. When a species becomes endangered it is an indicator that the health of the ecosystem is declining. Losing one component of the ecosystem can trigger the loss of other plant and animal species. [Click here to see an essay on Why Save the Giant Panda](#)

**Will the Giant Panda survive?** The future of the Giant Panda is linked to aggressive conservation efforts, successful captive breeding programs and assuring a sustainable habitat. The people of China understand that the Giant Panda is their "National Treasure" and they often bring sick or injured pandas to the Reserves for treatment. Both the people and the Government are learning the economic value of the panda in terms of tourism and travel to China.

**Who founded Pandas International? When?** Pandas International was founded in 2000 by Suzanne Braden and Diane Rees following a trip to China and a visit to the Panda Center. Both women left China knowing that the pandas needed help. Pandas International was formed to inform people about the plight of the pandas and to raise money to fund the Panda Centers in their attempt to preserve this magnificent species.

**What is Pandas International doing for the Giant Panda?** Pandas International supports the China Conservation & Research Center for the Giant Panda and has an education program to help everyone become aware of the pandas' endangered status. To see a complete list of what Pandas International provides, see [Donations in Action](#).

**What can I do to help the Giant Panda?** [Everyone can do something to help the pandas](#)

## **What you can do to Help the Pandas**

- Spread the word: share your passion to save the pandas. Send free post cards to friends and family from our website telling them you care about the pandas and that they are endangered
- Become a member of Pandas International. All levels help
- Sponsor a panda through Pandas International.
- Adopt a panda through Pandas International.
- Sign up for monthly donations.
- If you are a student, ask your teacher to do a class project on the pandas and perhaps sponsor a panda or raise money for the pandas.
- Host a panda party for your next Birthday, Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah, Baby Shower, Back to School, etc. What ever you choose to celebrate, you are never too old to help the pandas.
- Give panda items from our website any time you need a gift. The money helps the pandas and you get a great gift
- Check out [Other Ways to Give](#) to give without spending a dime!
- Clean out your attic or basement and hold a garage sale with proceeds going to help the pandas.
- Start an environmental club to help the pandas at your school or office.
- Host a fundraising event- lemonade stand, bake sale, sponsor a bike race
- Or best of all, become a Panda Protector with our Pennies 4 Pandas Project. You can do this on your own or with your school or other groups. See [www.pennies4pandas.org](http://www.pennies4pandas.org)
- Trick or Treat for pandas get our Pennies 4 Pandas kit and Trick or Treat asking for Pennies 4 Pandas instead of candy

**“Why Save the Giant Panda?”** was written by Pandas International staff member, Tom McCoy.

Granted the other problems we face here and around the globe, it seems a reasonable question. To answer “Because they’re sooo adorable!” makes it difficult to preserve species that don’t captivate us and puts the small and slimy and ugly at the end of a long list that gets longer everyday, a list of threatened plants and animals.

To understand why it is profoundly important to keep species thriving in the natural world is to understand how the natural world works, the world that makes our life on this planet possible.

First of all, species have been going extinct since species began. It is part of the “nature of things.” What is troubling, however, is the recent rapid rate of extinction. Although the source you consult to determine the speed of acceleration will offer differing but still alarming numbers, some facts are not up for debate. The most sobering fact is that the rate of extinction in the past 100 years is unparalleled in all our history, and, there is a direct connection to human activity.

When species get to the point of being endangered, something has happened to upset the balance that has provided for the plant or animal to succeed. Again, in some cases it is just the natural world’s way of balancing itself. But in almost all cases these days, it is the result of human interactions, which include logging, fishing, farming or development.

Endangered really means that a habitat has been degraded, has reached a point where its future and all the various life forms it supports are in grave danger of dying, of vanishing, and despite our ability to work scientific miracles, vanishing forever. As an example, the food the Giant Panda eats needs the shelter of the forest to grow. Remove the forest, and the bamboo will die off and then the Panda will be gone forever. In this particular instance, the illegal activities of poachers and hunters may also be adding to the declining number of Giant Pandas.

Healthy ecosystems are based on one principle: diversity promotes stability. The concept of interdependence allows the web of life although fragile, to also be unusually tough. The next time you see the extraordinary design of a spider’s web, imagine little bits of it being removed, and then more bits and soon there is a short single gossamer strand, isolated and weak, blowing away, never to return. Lynn Caporale, a pharmaceutical researcher puts it in another context. “The loss of biological diversity is the loss of a giant library that contains answers to questions that we haven’t learned how to ask.”

To protect our ecosystems is to protect the species that live within them. That includes seemingly insignificant species like minnows or grubs or wonderful looking species like Giant Pandas, or the species that has been able to split the atom, send people to the moon, break the genetic code.

Surely that last species will have the sense to realize that in saving the Panda we are saving more than an animal in a remote part of the world; that we are helping to preserve and nurture a myriad of life forms both large and small that live in the forest where the bamboo lives, and the Panda, if we’re as smart as we seem to be, will continue to live, too.