

Giant Panda

by

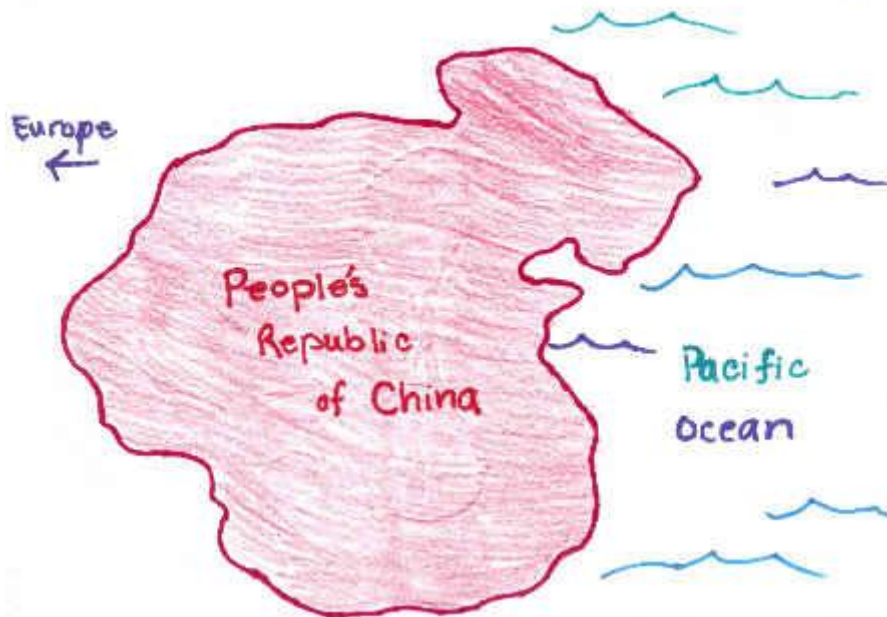
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Giant Pandas are the common name for this exotic and rare animal. Is a panda bear a bear or a raccoon? For many years, scientists could not agree on what family the panda bear belonged to. When the panda was first discovered, scientists classified it as a bear. Years later, it was classified as a raccoon instead. Finally, after much DNA research and observation, scientists finally agree that the panda is indeed a bear, and the scientific name is *Ailuropoda melanoleucus*. Panda bears give birth to live young and nurse their babies, which means that they are mammals. Panda bears can only be found living in bamboo forests in Central China. Many, many years ago, pandas once inhabited Asian countries of Laos, Burma, Vietnam, and China, but due to weather changes (drier climates), pandas are now limited to the damp and humid mountains of China where bamboo grows like crazy. Adult pandas weigh between 150-300 pounds.

Their body is usually 4-5 feet long with a tail that is about 5 inches. Males are a little bigger than females, and both have giant heads, heavy bodies, and round ears. Their faces are large because they have strong facial muscles to their powerful jaws. Pandas walk on all fours and when standing next to you, they come up to about your waist. Probably the most beautiful part of the panda is its thick, rough, black and white fur. Pandas' ears, eyes, legs, and back are all black, and most of their face and stomach are white. Panda bears eat a lot of bamboo. In a typical day a panda eats up to 25-30 pounds of bamboo. That is a lot of food! Bamboo does not have many vitamins in it, which is why pandas need to eat a lot of it. Pandas first eat the leaves, then they chomp on the bamboo stems and crack them open and eat the soft insides. The favorite part of the bamboo is the shoot, which is soft and tender. You might have eaten bamboo shoots if you have eaten Chinese food. Baby pandas are called cubs. They are born in the summer or fall after they spend 4 to 5 months in their mommy's tummy. When they are born, panda cubs are the size of hamsters and are already black and white. Usually two cubs are born at once, but the mom protects and nurtures only one and leaves the weaker one to live on its own, which it probably dies. That is so sad. Baby cubs have a loud cry and they cry a lot, whenever they are left alone. This is why the momma panda takes her baby everywhere, and

carries it in her mouth, to protect it from predators, other animals that want to hurt it. After a few years of living with its mom and learning how to survive, the cub goes off on its own to live alone forever, until it is time for it to mate. The giant pandas are endangered for a few reasons. The first reason being that their food supply, bamboo forests, are being cut down to use as firewood and to make room for new houses and fields for crops. The next reason is that selfish and mean people are poaching, or killing, pandas for their beautiful fur to use for rugs, coats, blankets, and wall hangings. Young pandas have also been captured for zoos and pets for rich people. What is being done to stop the extinction of this beautiful animal? Strict laws are being enforced in China and other countries that make it illegal to capture, kill, sell, or even possess pandas or their furs. Punishment for this crime can be up to life in prison. Also, to save the giant pandas, zoos help protect them and help them have more babies.



Ten facts:

1. Is the panda a bear or a raccoon? For years scientists couldn't figure it out, but now, they finally agree, a panda is a bear.
2. The panda uses its sharp back teeth to open bamboo to eat the soft inside.
3. Pandas have five fingers and a special thumb that is made up of bone on its wrist.
4. Panda's fur looks like it's soft, but it is actually rough with oils to keep it dry.
5. Pandas raise their young in giant hollow trees.
6. A panda spends most of its day eating up to 25-30 pounds of bamboo.
7. Pandas nap leaning against a tree or some just curl up on the ground.
8. Pandas live most of their lives by themselves.
9. A panda marks its territory by clawing a tree, or sliding its butt on the grounds where it leaves its scent.
10. Panda cubs leave their mom when they are one to two years old.