

The Giant Panda

by Kay Brickley

An Expensive Zoo Display

1 What is black and white and costs a million dollars a year? The answer is a giant panda! That is the cost of rent that each zoo must pay to display a giant panda from China. Zoos in our country do not own their giant pandas. The country of China loans them out for a few years so that zoos can conduct research and showcase these animals to fans around the world.

2 When you see your first giant panda up close, you begin to understand why zoos are willing to pay such a big price. The magnificent giant panda has the body of a typical bear and is about the same size. What makes it stand out is its unique black and white coloring. Many people think it looks like a very large, cuddly teddy bear. Do not make that mistake, for the giant panda is as dangerous as any bear. It has large molar teeth and strong jaw muscles for crushing tough bamboo.



In the wild, giant pandas eat almost nothing but bamboo. In zoos, the pandas eat bamboo, sugar cane, rice, and some fruits and vegetables.

Mott, M. (2006). Panda "rent" too high, U.S. zoos say. *National Geographic News*. Accessed March 28, 2011. Retrieved from http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/03/0313_060313_pandas.html

Facts: giant panda. (n.d.) *Smithsonian National Zoological Park*. Accessed March 28, 2011. Retrieved from <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/GiantPandas/PandaFacts/default.cfm>

The Endangered Panda

3 Giant pandas are an endangered species. That means that there are few of them left in the world, and they are in danger of disappearing from our planet. There are only about 1,600 wild giant pandas left in the world. They live in the mountains of central China. About another 300 giant pandas reside in zoos. What caused this beloved animal to become so rare?

4 You can find the cause in the giant panda's diet. The giant panda's favorite food is bamboo, which grows wild in forests of China. Bamboo is a kind of large, woodlike grass. It is used for everything from food and cooking to furniture, paper, musical instruments, boats, and houses. As China's population grows, it is cutting down more and more of the bamboo forests to make products. The effect is tragic. Soon there may be no room for the giant panda to live and gather food.

5 Because the giant panda's habitat is in danger of vanishing, China is eager to share its dearly loved pandas with zoos around the world. Giant pandas live to be about 20 years old in the wild but may live to be about 30 years when kept safe in zoos. In a zoo, giant pandas are well fed and protected. After about 10 years, the giant pandas return to their native China to live once again in the wild.

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Glossary

Showcase—event that shows the quality of something

Typical—normal

Crushing—to squeeze something until it breaks

Beloved—loved

Eager—very ready to do something

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