

Pandas to return to famous China reserve in 2012

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(AP) -- Sixty pandas relocated last year from a famous Chinese nature reserve after their breeding center was severely damaged by a massive earthquake will return home after repairs in 2012.

The panda breeding center in the Wolong nature reserve in southwest China's Sichuan province is undergoing a 379 million yuan (\$55 million) reconstruction expected to be completed by 2011, the official Xinhua News Agency said late Saturday.

The Wolong reserve's location in a damp, narrow valley several hours from Chengdu, the Sichuan capital, made it vulnerable during the 7.9-magnitude quake, which sent boulders the size of cars crashing down, destroying enclosures and administrative buildings.

The May 12, 2008, quake left nearly 90,000 people dead or missing, including 12 staffers at the panda center.

The center had 63 pandas before the quake, but one died, another went missing and a third died of illness, Xinhua said, citing Luo Zengbin, deputy head of the provincial forestry department. The surviving pandas have been moved to zoos elsewhere in China, with most sent to the Bifengxia panda base in the city of Ya'an.

About 1,590 pandas are living in the wild, mostly in Sichuan and the western province of Shaanxi. An additional 180 have been bred in captivity.

Wolong is part of efforts to breed giant [pandas](#) in hopes of increasing the species' chances of survival.

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