

# China to send pregnant pandas into semi-wild areas

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Tai Shan looks out of a specially designed crate on his way to Chengdu in China for a panda conservation and breeding programme. Researchers in China plan to send pregnant pandas bred in captivity into the semi-wilderness in an effort to introduce their cubs to a natural environment, state media said.

Researchers in China plan to send pregnant pandas bred in captivity into the semi-wilderness in an effort to introduce their cubs to a natural environment, state media said Thursday.

Zhang Hemin, head of the Wolong panda reserve in China's southwestern province of Sichuan, said one or two pregnant pandas would be released into a semi-wild area by the end of the year, Xinhua news agency said.

The release area would be fenced but similar to the wilderness, allowing Zhang and his colleagues to monitor the animals, the report said.

"The pandas will give birth in this semi-wild environment and teach their cubs how to forage for food and survive in the wild," he was quoted as saying.

This transitional period would last about two years, and the panda cubs would then be released into wild mountain forests outside the enclosed zone, it said.

Six pregnant pandas have been short-listed for the task, and one or two of them will soon be chosen based on their health, temperament and survival skills, Zhang said.

Veterinarians and other workers who enter the initial enclosed zone will have to meld into the environment to help keep it as wild an experience for the pandas as possible, he added.

"Zoo workers and vets who enter the zone will disguise themselves as pandas by donning a black-and-white fur coat and crawling on the ground."

There are only about 1,590 pandas living in the wild in China, mostly in Sichuan, Shaanxi province in the north and Gansu in the northwest.

At least 180 have been bred in captivity, but their notoriously low libidos have frustrated efforts to boost their numbers.

China has started construction on a research centre in Sichuan that aims to help [captive](#) pandas adapt to the wild, but it will not be completed for another three to five years.

China's plan to save the endangered species by releasing captive-bred pandas into the wild began in 2003 with Xiang Xiang, a male cub who was trained to adapt and released into nature in 2006, Xinhua said.

But he was found dead 10 months later, apparently killed by wild [pandas](#) native to the area.

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