Red panda goes missing from US zoo

June 24 2013

A red panda (also known as a lesser panda) relaxes in its enclosure at the Beijing zoo on June 24, 2013. The National Zoo in Washington put out an all-points bulletin via Twitter after one of its raccoon-like red pandas went missing.

The National Zoo in Washington put out an all-points bulletin via Twitter on Monday after one of its raccoon-like red pandas went missing.

Rusty, a male, was last seen Sunday evening at the popular Smithsonian-

run zoological park, where staff combed trees Monday morning in search of the missing critter.

"He could be sick and hiding or someone could have taken him," the zoo said on its @NationalZoo Twitter feed, where it urged the public to call immediately if they spot Rusty.

"Red pandas typically spend the warm daytime hours resting, so it's likely Rusty is somewhere in or near the Zoo hiding in a tree... Remember: red pandas are wild animals and will bite if cornered or scared."

On its website (nationalzoo.si.edu), the zoo said Rusty—who turns one year old in July—settled into its Asia Trail exhibit earlier this month to breed with female red panda Shama.

Not to confused with the National Zoo's giant panda bears from China, red pandas are small tree-dwelling mammals native to the Himalayas and southwestern China. Their name is derived from their reddish-brown fur.

Rusty came to the National Zoo from the Lincoln Children's Zoo in Nebraska.

In June 2010 Shama gave birth to the first red panda cub born at the National Zoo in 15 years. Sadly it died after three weeks, for reasons that were not immediately known.

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