

China panda population stable: report

19 September 2009



A panda is seen playing with a ball at the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda, in the Wolong Nature Reserve in China's southwestern Sichuan province. China's wild panda population has remained stable despite last year's Sichuan earthquake that damaged key areas of the endangered species' habitat, according to state press.

China's wild panda population has remained stable despite last year's Sichuan earthquake that damaged key areas of the endangered species' habitat, state press said Saturday.

A recent survey in Sichuan province concluded that the deadly May 12 tremor did not lead to significant fatalities in the panda population, the Chengdu Evening News said.

"The panda has a strong capacity to adapt, we have not found any cases of pandas dying because of the earthquake," the paper quoted Yang Xuyu, an expert involved with the survey, as saying.

The 8.0-magnitude earthquake was the strongest to hit China in decades and left more than 87,000 people dead or missing, while devastating cities and towns.

Remote sensing of the region found that only about three percent of the panda's habitat in southwestern Sichuan province was damaged to differing degrees by the quake, the report said.

However, in an area near the epicentre where 35 wild pandas live, more than 37 percent of the habitat was damaged, including significant areas of bamboo forests, the animal's main food, the report said.

The damage could threaten the survivability of the group of pandas collectively known as Minshan Zone Group B, the report said.

There are about 1,590 [pandas](#) living in the wild around China, mostly in Sichuan, northern Shaanxi and northwestern Gansu provinces. A total of 180 have been bred in captivity, according to earlier reports.

In addition to environmental constraints, the animals' notoriously low libidos have frustrated efforts to boost their numbers.

In a recent report issued by the World Wildlife Fund, the conservation group warned that the [giant panda](#) could soon die out as rapid economic development is infringing on its way of life.

The report said that the pandas' habitat is being split into smaller patches, preventing them from roaming freely to look for partners and in turn endangering their [gene pool](#).

"If the panda cannot mate with those from other habitats, it may face extinction within two to three generations," said Fan Zhiyong, Beijing-based species programme director for WWF.

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