

Chinese scientist says prehistoric man ate pandas

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Wei says wild pandas lived in Chongqing's high mountains 10,000 to 1 million years ago.

The Chinese government invests greatly in studying the [native species](#) and trying to ensure its survival. [Pandas](#) number about 1,600 in the wild, where they are critically endangered due to poaching and development. More than 300 live in captivity, mostly in China's breeding programs.

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In this Oct. 11, 2012 file photo, Mei Xiang, a giant female panda, rests at the National Zoo in Washington. A Chinese scientist said that humans used to eat pandas. In a newspaper interview, Wei Guangbiao said prehistoric man ate the bears in what is now part of the city of Chongqing in southwest China. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, File)

China's beloved national symbol—the panda—may have been seen quite differently by ancient humans: as food.

Scientist Wei Guangbiao says [prehistoric man](#) ate pandas in an area that is now part of the city of Chongqing in southwest China.

Wei, head of the Institute of Three Gorges Paleoanthropology at a Chongqing museum, says many excavated panda fossils "showed that pandas were once slashed to death by man."

The Chongqing Morning Post quoted him Friday as saying: "In primitive times, people wouldn't kill animals that were useless to them" and therefore the pandas must have been used as food.

But he says pandas were much smaller then.

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