

Chinese scientist says prehistoric man ate pandas

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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.

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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