

Survey finds giant pandas no longer 'endangered' in China

September 5 2016, by Kerry Sheridan



The cornerstones of the Chinese effort to bring back its pandas have included an intense effort to replant bamboo forests, which provide food and shelter for the bears

Decades of conservation work in China have paid off for the giant panda, whose status was upgraded Sunday from "endangered" to "vulnerable" due to a population rebound, officials said.

The improvement for the giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) was announced as part of an update to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, the world's most comprehensive inventory of plants and animals.

The latest estimates show a population of 1,864 adult giant pandas. Although exact numbers are not available, adding cubs to the projection would mean about 2,060 pandas exist today, said the IUCN.

"Evidence from a series of range-wide national surveys indicate that the previous population decline has been arrested, and the population has started to increase," said the IUCN's updated report.

The cornerstones of the Chinese government's effort to bring back its fuzzy, black-and-white national icon have included an intense effort to replant bamboo forests, which provide food and shelter for the bears.

Through its "rent-a-panda" captive breeding program, China has also loaned some bears to zoos abroad in exchange for cash, and reinvested that money in conservation efforts.

"When push comes to shove, the Chinese have done a really good job with pandas," John Robinson, a primatologist and chief conservation officer at the Wildlife Conservation Society, told AFP.

"So few species are actually downlisted, it really is a reflection of the success of conservation," he said at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, the largest meeting of its kind, which drew more than 9,000 heads of state, policymakers and environmentalists to Honolulu.

Giant panda no longer 'endangered'

Its status has been upgraded to 'vulnerable' in the IUCN's latest Red List

Population

in the wild: **approx. 2,060**
mainly
in China

- Size: up to 1.20 m (on all fours)
- Weight: 100-140 kg
- Food: bamboo
- Genetic background is similar to the bear



Climate change threatens 35% of its habitat with destruction within 80 years

Source: IUCN

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Giant Panda as it moves off the 'Endangered' list down to 'Vulnerable' in the latest Red List issued by the International Union for Conservation

According to Simon Stuart, chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the improvement was "not rocket science" but came from the hard work of controlling poaching and replanting bamboo forests.

"This is something to celebrate because it is not a part of the world where we expect this to happen," Stuart told reporters at a press conference to unveil the updated Red List.

Experts warned, however, that the good news for pandas could be short-lived.

A warming planet, driven by [fossil fuel burning](#), is predicted to wipe out more than one-third of the panda's bamboo habitat in the next 80 years.

That means the panda population is projected to decline, and any gains realized to date could be reversed, said Carlo Rondinini, mammal assessment coordinator at the Sapienza University of Rome.

"The concern now is that although the [population](#) has slowly increased—and it is still very small—several models predict a reduction of the extent of bamboo forests in China in the coming decades due to climate change," he told reporters.

The IUCN report said China's plan to expand its [conservation](#) effort for [pandas](#) "is a positive step and must be strongly supported to ensure its effective implementation."

The IUCN Red List includes 82,954 species, including both plants and animals.

Almost one-third—23,928—are threatened with extinction, it said.

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