

## Unit 3: Protecting Pandas

**Narrator:** If there's one animal that lives up to the saying you are what you eat, it's probably the giant panda. What giant pandas eat affects many different parts of their lives.

For one, giant pandas have to eat, and eat, and eat. Pandas can spend more than half of each day eating. This is because pandas mostly eat bamboo, which is a giant woody grass. Bamboo is a very poor source of nutrition for pandas. It's low in protein and high in fiber, a material which is very difficult to digest. Since 99 percent of a panda's diet is bamboo, pandas need to eat a lot of it, 9 to 18 kilograms a day.

Pandas also have tiny cubs because of their poor diet. Baby pandas are born blind, helpless, and tiny. They weigh just 140 grams and are about one thousandth the size of their mother. No other mammals' babies are born so much smaller than the adult of its species. This, too, is partly due to their bamboo diet. But once born, panda cubs grow quickly. One-year-old pandas can weigh about 45 kilograms.

Pandas' black and white fur may help them camouflage. Once again, we can look at a panda's diet to help understand why its fur is the color it is. In winter, many animals lose their darker fur and grow white fur. But since pandas are always moving around in search of bamboo, they can't change their fur quickly enough to match their background like other animals can. So being both black and white may help them to hide in snow, as well as among the dark leaves of the forest. In the past, pandas lived in and traveled across much larger areas of land and faced multiple predators. So, at the time, they may have relied more on their black and white camouflage.

Today, however, the main threat to pandas is not from predators, but rather from a loss of bamboo. Human development has driven wild pandas into the mountains, away from their usual habitats and the bamboo they need. Climate change also threatens more than a third of the bamboo habitat that pandas rely on.

The good news is that the giant panda is no longer classified as endangered, only vulnerable. Today, about 1,850 pandas remain in the wild in China, an increase of 17 percent over the past decade.