

The Giant Panda Bear

Panda bears are very popular animals, partly because of their unusual appearance and partly because there is something mysterious and fascinating about them. However, their numbers are falling. It is thought that only around 1600 giant pandas still survive in the wild.

Appearance

Giant pandas have the same type of body shape as other bears. They have thick black and white fur, which some scientists think may be to disguise them in the snowy and rocky surroundings where they live. An adult can grow up to 1.5 metres and weigh up to 150 kilograms. They might look cute but they have razor-like claws. They also have powerful jaws for crushing and grinding bamboo!

Habitat

Giant pandas in the wild live on mountainous slopes in western China. Their habitat is densely populated with fir trees and bamboo. It is the forests in these mountains that attract the panda as bamboo is their favourite food.

Diet

In the wild, their main diet is bamboo. To survive, they need to eat for most of the day. In fact, they eat 15 to 30 kilograms of food every day and spend 10 to 16 hours feeding. In zoos, they have a specially prepared diet of bamboo, eggs, fish and honey.

Cubs

Newborn cubs weigh around 150 grams (about the weight of an apple) and are all white at birth. The black spots develop after about a month. They begin eating bamboo at six months and weigh 31 to 36 kilograms at the end of the first year. Cubs stay with their mother for two to three years, reach maturity at five to seven years and live in the wild for about 25 years.

1. Pandas can grow up to 1.5 metres and weigh up to 150 kilograms.

What else in the text tells us that giant pandas could be dangerous animals?

1 mark

2. Number these facts about the life of the giant panda cub from 1-5 in the order in which they happen. The first one has been done for you.

A cub eats bamboo for the first time.

A cub leaves its mother.

A cub develops black spots.

A cub weighs 31 to 36 kilograms.

A cub weighs about the same as an apple.

1 mark

3. According to the text, give **one** way that giant pandas are...

(a) similar to other bears.

1 mark

(b) different from other bears.

1 mark

