



Above: Takauji held a Tokyo photo exhibition of Xiang Xiang in February, before the popular panda returned to China. The exhibition included more than 900 pictures taken since her birth in 2017. — Xinhua



Right: Takahiro Takauji is probably the most prolific panda photographer in the world. — Xinhua

homes for pandas on loan, Ouwehands Dierenpark in the Netherlands invested more than US\$7 million and Memphis Zoo coughed up more than US\$16 million.

Earlier this year, the cash-strapped Ahtari Zoo in Finland said it may have to return two giant pandas to China because it can no longer afford their upkeep.

“Panda diplomacy” has turned pandas into celebrities with avid fans around the world.

In China, public concern about Ya Ya’s health led to a spontaneous campaign by Chinese people abroad to visit foreign zoos with pandas and video their conditions. The videos were posted online, attracting millions of hits.

In Japan, webpage designer and photographer Takahiro Takauji has been photographing giant pandas almost every day for 11 years.

Known as “Mr Panda” for his obsession with the animal, Takauji started the website Mainichi Panda (“daily panda”) in 2011 to display all the photos he has taken in Ueno Zoo in Tokyo.

In the United States, Danny Spungen, after a visit to China, has been collecting panda-themed coins for more than 10 years, and Belgian couple Celine and Andre Cornet have amassed more than 2,500 pieces of panda-related collectibles since 1978.

Chen Kangling, deputy researcher at the China Institute of Fudan University, said adoration for pandas is borderless and more international study of pandas is needed.

“Pandas as national treasures have attracted so many fans around world, and ‘panda diplomacy’ flows with the trend,” Chen told Shanghai Daily. “Being envoys of friendship, these pandas bring people together.”

Chen said China should do more to promote the history and culture of pandas.

“A record of giant pandas was found in the book ‘Classic of Mountains and Rivers’ more than 2,000 years ago,” he said. “The panda’s staple of bamboo is also a significant cultural element in China, so we can take advantage of panda popularity to spread information on China’s long heritage with bamboo.”

Basic facts of giant pandas



1,864

The population of giant pandas in the wild reached 1,864 in 2021, while 673 pandas were in captivity up to 2022.

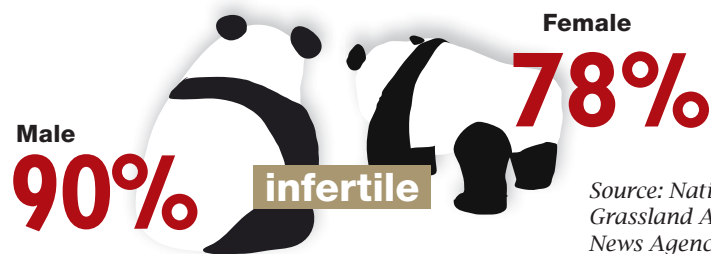
The average lifetime of a giant panda in the wild is **15 to 20** years; currently the oldest wild panda is **26**.



673

The average lifetime of a captive giant panda is **20-30** years; the oldest Xin Xing (1982-2020) lived to **38**, or the equivalent to 110 years in human longevity.

In 2016, the conservation organization IUCN downgraded giant pandas from “endangered” to “vulnerable.”



Source: National Forestry and Grassland Administration; Xinhua News Agency; World Wild Fund

Fun Facts of giant panda

The black-and-white fur of giant pandas provides perfect camouflage in their natural habitat of white snow and forest shadows.

Giant pandas are excellent swimmers.



The digestive systems of giant pandas can process meat, but the animals still mainly live on bamboo. Each needs to eat **12-38** kilograms of bamboo every day.

Giant pandas poop an average of **40** times a day.

Panda have useful thumbs – like humans – to hold food.



Source: World Wild Fund

Basic facts of ‘leasing’ giant pandas

Giant pandas are “rented” for 10-15 years, and the period can be prolonged for several years.

The cubs born to rented pandas belong to China and have to be returned to China two to four years after they are born.

If a giant panda dies overseas, its remains must be returned to China.

Many countries have invested millions of dollars to build homes for giant pandas. Ouwehands Dierenpark in the Netherlands invested more than **US\$7 million**, while Memphis Zoo, where Ya Ya lives, invested more than **US\$16 million**.

Source: Xinhua News Agency

Graphics by Li Xiaoying, Lu Feiran and Xu Qing