

ADVERTISEMENT

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 11/07/2024 10:47:28 PM

Panda 'ambassadors' build trust overseas

Co-operation on bears continue amid conservation efforts

By ZHAO JIA

During a visit to Adelaide Zoo on his recent official visit to Australia, Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced that China would loan a new pair of giant pandas to the country to continue co-operative research on conservation of the globally loved animal.

Adelaide Zoo has been home to giant pandas Wang Wang and Fu Ni since 2009, when they were relocated to South Australia from Wolong National Nature Reserve in Southwest China's Sichuan province.

The bears were loaned for a period of 10 years and the arrangement was extended by five years in 2019. The extension of the loan is due to expire at the end of this year.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said the new pandas would remain the star attraction of the zoo, the only one in the Southern Hemisphere that has giant pandas.

Since 1949, China has sent pandas to foreign zoos to act as goodwill ambassadors. For the recipients, the move is widely considered a gesture of friendship, trust and respect.

Following former US President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972, Ling Ling and Hsing Hsing arrived at Washington National Zoo in April of that year as a gift from the Chinese government. They were the first giant pandas sent to the US.

In the 1980s, the country stopped sending pandas abroad as gifts due to their dwindling numbers. The endangered animals could only be loaned, often in pairs for 10-year periods, for breeding and biological research co-operation with foreign countries. All cubs born abroad belong to China.

In October 2022, Qatar became the first country in the Middle East to receive Chinese giant pandas when a pair arrived in the capital Doha to mark the hosting of the FIFA World Cup. Female Si Hai and male Jing Jing are due to stay in Qatar for 15 years under a giant panda conservation and research co-operation project.

"The arrival of two pandas added to the festive atmosphere of the World Cup. These have become a new name card for the friendship between Qatar and China," said Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Riyadh when meeting with visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping in December 2022.

The Qatari government built a hall for the giant pandas so that they can enjoy air conditioning and sleep in separate quarters. Facilities for medical treatment, food preparation, bamboo preservation and safety monitoring are also in place.

Caretakers look after the pandas around the clock and communicate with them in Mandarin and English. Staff members are also learning the Sichuan dialect to make the pandas "feel at home".

While keeping pandas can be costly for zoos, they are seen as drawcards for visitors and help generate income. Also, China has strict standards when it comes to selecting foreign zoos for giant panda cooperation projects.

Si Ping, deputy secretary-general of the China Wildlife Conservation Association, said potential partners must have a good reputation and a strong desire for collaboration.

They should have complete facilities, sufficient food sources, a professional feeding and management team, a high-level scientific research team, and the capability for sustainable development, she said.



Yun Chuan, an almost five-year-old male panda, at his new home in the San Diego Zoo, California, on July 19. Panda pair Yun Chuan and Xin Bao arrived at the zoo from China in June, starting a 10-year international conservation co-operation project. SAN DIEGO ZOO WILDLIFE ALLIANCE VIA XINHUA

Only institutions that meet these requirements can be considered for potential co-operation partners, she added.

In San Francisco last November, President Xi announced that China is ready to continue its co-operation with the US on panda conservation to deepen the friendly ties between the people of both countries.

In May, US first lady Jill Biden and the National Zoo in Washington jointly announced that the zoo will be home to two new giant pandas, Bao Li and Qing Bao, by the end of this year. The zoo sent its three pandas back to China in November. "We can't wait to celebrate this historic moment here in our nation's capital," said the US first lady in an official video released by the zoo.

US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns on social media welcomed the pandas being sent to Washington, describing them as "iconic symbols of US-China relations since President Nixon's visit a half century ago."

In June, giant pandas Yun Chuan and Xin Bao arrived at the San Diego Zoo in California to start a 10-year international giant panda conservation co-operation.

In Japan, many people are familiar with Xiang Xiang, who was born in June 2017 at the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo and returned to China last year. Distance has not diminished Japanese people's affection for the celebrity panda and many have travelled to China to see the female panda in her shelter in Ya'an, Sichuan.

Nearly 200 giant panda lovers in Tokyo celebrated Xiang Xiang's seventh birthday in June.

At the gathering, Toshimitsu Doi, president of the Panda Protection Institute of Japan, said he hoped more Japanese people would come to love giant pandas and travel to China, the home of the animals, to enhance their understanding of the country.

More than 10 giant pandas, including Fu Bao,

are due to return to China this year, according to the China Wildlife Conservation Association.

Fu Bao was born at the Everland Park in the Republic of Korea in July 2020 to two giant pandas moved to the country in 2016. The panda returned to Chengdu, Sichuan, on April 3.

Fu Bao's videos enjoyed massive popularity on Everland Park's YouTube channel, attracting around 500 million views. Everland said about 5.5 million people had visited the park just to see Fu Bao.

Amid the continued popularity of pandas, China has launched multimedia platform iPanda, which highlights the breeding and conservation projects of giant pandas and other rare wildlife species.

Panda lovers around the world are able to watch live panda broadcasts on the YouTube channels of the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda and the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.

A flagship species of wildlife conservation, the giant panda has also played an important role in advancing protection of biodiversity. As the rarest member of the bear family and one of the world's most vulnerable animals, the giant panda has long drawn global attention to at-risk and endangered species.

Since its founding in 1961, the World Wide Fund for Nature has used the giant panda on its logo, with the iconic image serving as a rallying symbol for the global conservation movement.

In 2021, China officially designated its first group of national parks, including the Giant Panda National Park with a total area covering about 8,500 square miles.

The move marks an important step forward in China's efforts to promote ecological protection and facilitate harmonious co-existence between humans and nature.

According to the National Forestry and Grass-

land Administration, China is carrying out panda conservation research with 18 overseas institutions from 17 countries, and there are over 50 giant pandas living abroad.

Both Chinese and foreign parties have jointly tackled a series of technical challenges in the areas of giant panda conservation, breeding, disease prevention and control, and reintroduction to the wild, significantly enhancing the scientific research of giant panda conservation.

Phil Ainsley, the director of Adelaide Zoo, has shared his excitement about the two new pandas heading to Australia in a video interview with reporters, saying the move allows him and his colleagues to continue to conserve and learn about the "amazing species".

"The conservation messages is really important," he said, adding collaborative programmes between the two countries not only help the giant panda, but also other species that will benefit from the restoration and protection of environments.

Ainsley said ongoing learning about giant pandas is equally important, as it will help secure their future.

Chinese and foreign experts are also collaborating to promote the breeding of more giant pandas. China and the United States have jointly bred 17 panda cubs in the US who survived to adulthood.

China and Spain have bred six giant panda cubs, making Spain the most successful country in Europe for breeding cooperation.

In 2021, China announced pandas had been downgraded from endangered to vulnerable, saying the classification upgrade reflected the animals' improved living conditions and the country's efforts to integrate their habitats.

Thanks to the ongoing giant panda conservation efforts, the number of wild pandas in China has grown to nearly 1,900.

Butterfly guardian helps with biodiversity

By WANG XIAOYU and LI YINGQING

The life of Yang Zhenwen is deeply intertwined with butterflies, so much so that the 47-year-old has three nicknames associated with the winged insects.

The curator of the Butterfly Museum in Jinping county, Yunnan, Yang is sometimes referred to as "the butterfly daddy" because he has traversed the mountains of the province in Southwest China for more than two decades to survey butterfly species and contribute to their conservation.

The passionate enthusiast has accompanied scientists on treks into the mountains in Jinping, and even contributed to the discovery and identification of new butterfly species.

His museum is home to more than 2,200 butterfly specimens, and is the headquarters for Yang to spread knowledge about the insect and promote awareness of environmental protection.

When he is giving tours to visitors and nature enthusiasts, he becomes "the butterfly encyclopedia".

The moniker "the butterfly guardian" has also been bestowed on Yang for his meticulous care for the delicate insects.

As a special treat for the butterflies, he and his fellow villagers have created a concoction of water, sugar, sticky rice flour and pineapple that they spray around the local trails and on branches in the forest.

Yang was born and raised in the town of Ma'andi in Jinping county, which is part of the Honghe Hani and Yi autonomous prefecture, bordering Vietnam.

The town has a mild and humid climate with an average temperature of about 18 C and abundant rainfall all year round. There are more than 6,590 acres of bamboo that provide the butterflies in the area with plentiful food and ideal breeding grounds.

An extraordinary event occurs in Jinping in May and June each year as an estimated 100 million butterflies burst forth from their chrysalises in the biodiversity county, creating a rare sight known as a butterfly explosion.

"When I was a kid, a mountain path leading to my school was thronged with so many butterflies that I had to wave them aside to make my way forward," said Yang. "Some elderly people in the village said that there were even more butterflies when they were young, but there is no clear record as to when butterflies first emerged here."

The butterfly is a symbol of love in China. In a well-known legend considered the Chinese equivalent of Romeo and Juliet, two star-crossed lovers separated due to pressures from their families, transformed into a pair of butterflies and live happily ever after.

In the 1980s, locals in Jinping disliked the abundance of butterflies, fearing they were affecting their crops, and some even sprayed chemicals to curb their population.

"For me, I just thought the scene of butterflies flapping their wings in the breeze was very beautiful," said Yang, who was working at an agricultural facility at the time.

Research shows that the so-called butterfly valley in Ma'andi township has more than 320 species from 11 of the 12 butterfly families found in China, and the most common species is Stichopthalma, or jungle queen.

Countless hours spent in the forest have endowed Yang with a vivid understanding of the role butterflies play in nature.

"Because it is an extremely delicate insect, butterflies can also be as seen as a symbol of the health of the local ecology, and only in a favourable, healthy environment can the spectacle of a butterfly explosion occur," Yang said.

He said that about 90 per cent of butterflies are eaten by other insects before they reach the adult stage. "As a result, behind a butterfly explosion is an enormous population of diverse animals. Butterflies not only provide a breathtaking sight for us to enjoy, but also contribute to biodiversity."

The butterfly valley in Ma'andi township has been gaining popularity among domestic and foreign tourists, and the residents have set up rural homestays and restaurants to cater to their needs. According to local authorities, more than 2 million tourists have visited since 2010.

Yang Tingcui, who owns a local grocery store and a hostel, said that she is glad of Jinping county's growing popularity and the increasing number of travellers.

"I strive to keep my rooms clean so that tourists can have a good rest here after they've experienced the mountains and the butterfly valley," she said.



Yang Zhenwen examines a butterfly in Jinping, Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

River receiving pristine protection

By ALEXIS HOOI and ZHANG LI

Villager Pan Jinsheng remembers how he would trudge up the mountain slopes surrounding his home more than a decade ago, cutting down thickets of wild bamboo to sell.

"We had to rely on nature for our survival, but we also knew depleting the forest in this way wasn't sustainable," said Pan, 54.

In 2011, he turned to ecotourism by offering food and lodging to an increasing number of visitors to the area.

"We continue to rely on these mountains and valleys, but this time, our lives are improving together with the environment," Pan said.

His view reflects a growing local awareness among his neighbours of protecting their pristine home to reap the green rewards of sustainable development, which is especially significant as his village sits at the foot of Mao'er Mountain. The highland is the source of the Lijiang River winding through Guilin, a tourism hub in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

The iconic waterway, flowing more than 99 miles amid Guilin's picturesque karst landscape, is featured on the 20-yuan note of the Chinese renminbi.

The latest efforts by the public and private sectors to preserve and protect the major river and its flora and fauna are seeing record achievements — ranging from the quality of water originating at its mist-covered mountainous source to fish and other aquatic life thriving downstream in Guilin's urban area — altogether presenting a model of growth in harmony with nature.

More than 5 billion yuan (\$703.5 million) has been earmarked for a three-year Lijiang ecological restoration project, including the cleanup of

sand mining sites, stone quarries and waste discharge. Guilin also designated April 25 as Lijiang River Protection Day to improve local residents' environmental awareness.

In recent years, the city has implemented more than 30 major projects in the Lijiang River Basin, including integrated protection and restoration efforts that cover mountains, rivers, forests and lakes, according to authorities. At least 10 tributaries of the river have been placed under centralised pollution control, with sewage treatment facilities set up in towns along its banks.

At Mao'er Mountain, Zheng Yongming regularly leads a team of nine patrollers on foot, reaching altitudes of more than 5,900 feet to look for any activity that may harm the national nature reserve.

"The waters here feed the Lijiang, so we must watch over them," Zheng said.

"Biodiversity has markedly improved with the growing green awareness of residents and visitors. It's common to come across wildlife such as black bears and monkeys, and there have been no cases of forest fires in recent years."

The reserve now has at least 13 conservation stations under its comprehensive ecological protection system, helping it attain a forest coverage rate of about 99 per cent to provide for over 6,600 species of flora and fauna.

National-level protected animals, including the clouded leopard, dwarf musk deer and Chinese giant salamander, are thriving in the area, where thousand-year-old southern Chinese hemlocks rise above oxygen-rich alpine wetlands with over 2,400 vascular plant species capping the lush highlands.

Eminent hydrogeologist and environmental geologist Lu Yaoru, who has studied Guilin's



The Guilin section of the Lijiang River in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region is a top tourist attraction with its picturesque natural scenery. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

karst landscape and its related water features extensively, said the city has made outstanding achievements in biodiversity conservation and the sustainable development of the Lijiang River.

Guilin can fully leverage its abundant natural resources to develop agriculture, biomedicine and other green sectors, integrating the health and tourism industries to build a sustainable, world-class tourism city.

Strengthening the introduction and cultivation of ecological and environmental research talent is also important, said Lu, who sits on several national and international expert committees focusing on development and the environment.

"Guilin has a number of scientific research institutes and universities that have set up research projects in environmental and geosciences, but it is still necessary to introduce international and domestic innovative talent in related research, especially in interdisciplinary fields through international co-operation and exchanges," Lu said.

"Over the years, Guilin has attached great importance to accelerating its green and low-carbon transformation by supporting the development of green industries," he said.

Leading the green charge in Guilin's business sector is textile and apparel giant Esquel Group, which has a major facility in the city focused on sustainable development. The company has introduced "an eco-wash process that uses just 4 per cent of the water needed to wash a typical garment, eliminating wastewater entirely," said Teresa Yang, the company's vice-chairperson.

"In 2021, we announced our pledge to achieve carbon neutrality. Integral, our sustainable development garden in Guilin, showcases how a traditional industry can transform its operations to become a more sustainable business model. We have managed to achieve zero discharge and earn major awards such as the LEED certification," said Yang, referring to the global green building rating system.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 11/07/2024 10:47:28 PM



CHINA DAILY GLOBAL WEEKLY
A 32-page weekend tabloid, featuring news, views and analysis of China and the globe.

Now readers can find China Daily Global Weekly on Flipster, the digital magazine subscription platform from EBSCO, which provides institutions worldwide with leading research databases, scholarly journals, magazine subscriptions, e-books, discovery services and more.

ebsco.com/products/flipster/magazine/china-daily-global-weekly