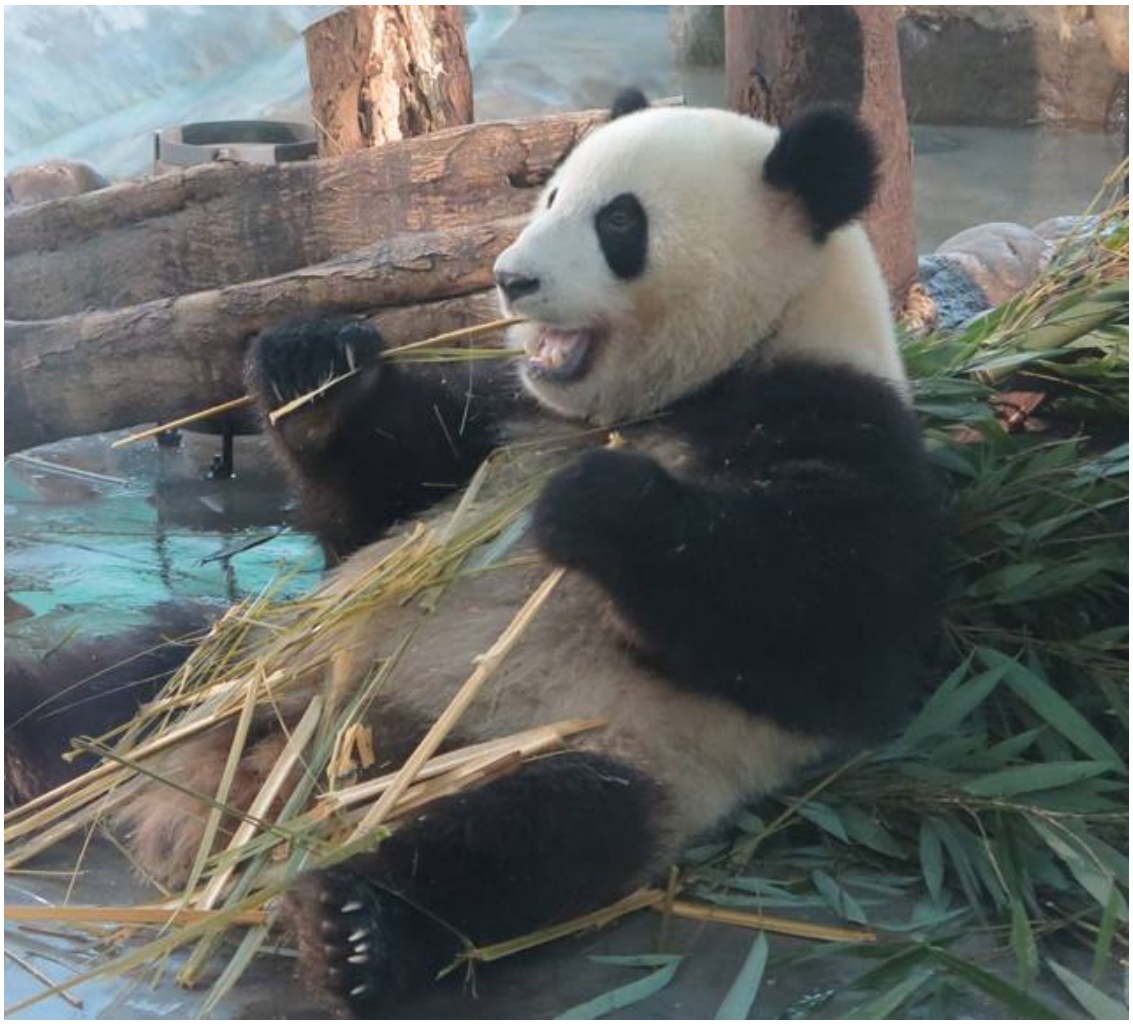
Chengdu research base sees amazing ‘Panda Boom’

Reporters from the China-South Asia and Southeast Asia Center visited the Chengdu Research Base for Giant Panda Breeding in early August. This “Home of the Panda” looks quite different than it did when I visited 10 years ago. There are many more facilities and many more giant pandas in the thickened forest.



Giant panda in Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding [Photo / China.org.cn]

Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding was founded in 1987, starting out with just six sick and starving giant pandas rescued from the wild. Today, there are over 180.

The Giant panda is an endangered species found only in a few mountain ranges in central China, mainly in Sichuan Province but with some in neighboring Shaanxi and Gansu. In the late 1970s, there were estimated to be only around 1,000 living in the wild.

According to the latest census (2014) by China’s State Forestry

Administration, this population had grown by 268, or 16.8%, to a total of 1,864. In late 2016, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) changed the classification of the species from “endangered” to “vulnerable.”

Meanwhile, as of December 2014, a total of 49 giant pandas were living in captivity outside China.

However this much-loved distinctive black and white animal is an extremely vulnerable species threatened by continued habitat loss and habitat fragmentation, and by a very low birthrate, both in the wild and in captivity.

Breeding giant pandas is incredibly hard. Female pandas only ovulate once a year. Not only that, but the window that a male panda has to inseminate the female while in ovulation is only about 36-40 hours. And in captivity, many male pandas appear uninterested in mating or do not seem to know how to proceed.

The survival rate of newborn panda cubs is very low even under conditions of artificial rearing and in the wild even lower.

Despite these difficulties, the research base has managed to produce a “Panda Boom” phenomenon in recent years.

Up to 2015, it had managed to breed 143 giant panda cubs, serving as the largest artificial breeding population for captive giant pandas that ensures the genetic quality and the individual health of the population.

Over the past 30 years, researchers have tackled such key technological bottlenecks for captive giant pandas as artificial feeding and management, breeding and rearing infants, diseases prevention and population heredity management.

The base has made many technology breakthroughs and achieved multiple original innovative scientific results. More than 70 scientific projects of the Base have been awarded national, provincial or municipal technical innovation honors and scientific progress awards.

While paying much attention to both scientific research and tourism development, it has shaped a sustainable development mode of “industry-university-research-tourism cooperation.”

By simulating the wild ecological environment for giant pandas through landscape architecture, it has set up a delivery room, breeding area, scientific and research center and hospital in an orderly manner, and many luxurious “villa residences” for the giant pandas are scattered in the forest.

In 1998, the base was evaluated as a World Nature Heritage site. In 2006, it was listed as the AAAA tourism attraction and, by 2015, was receiving three million tourists a year.