

LEVELED BOOK • P

GIANT PANDAS

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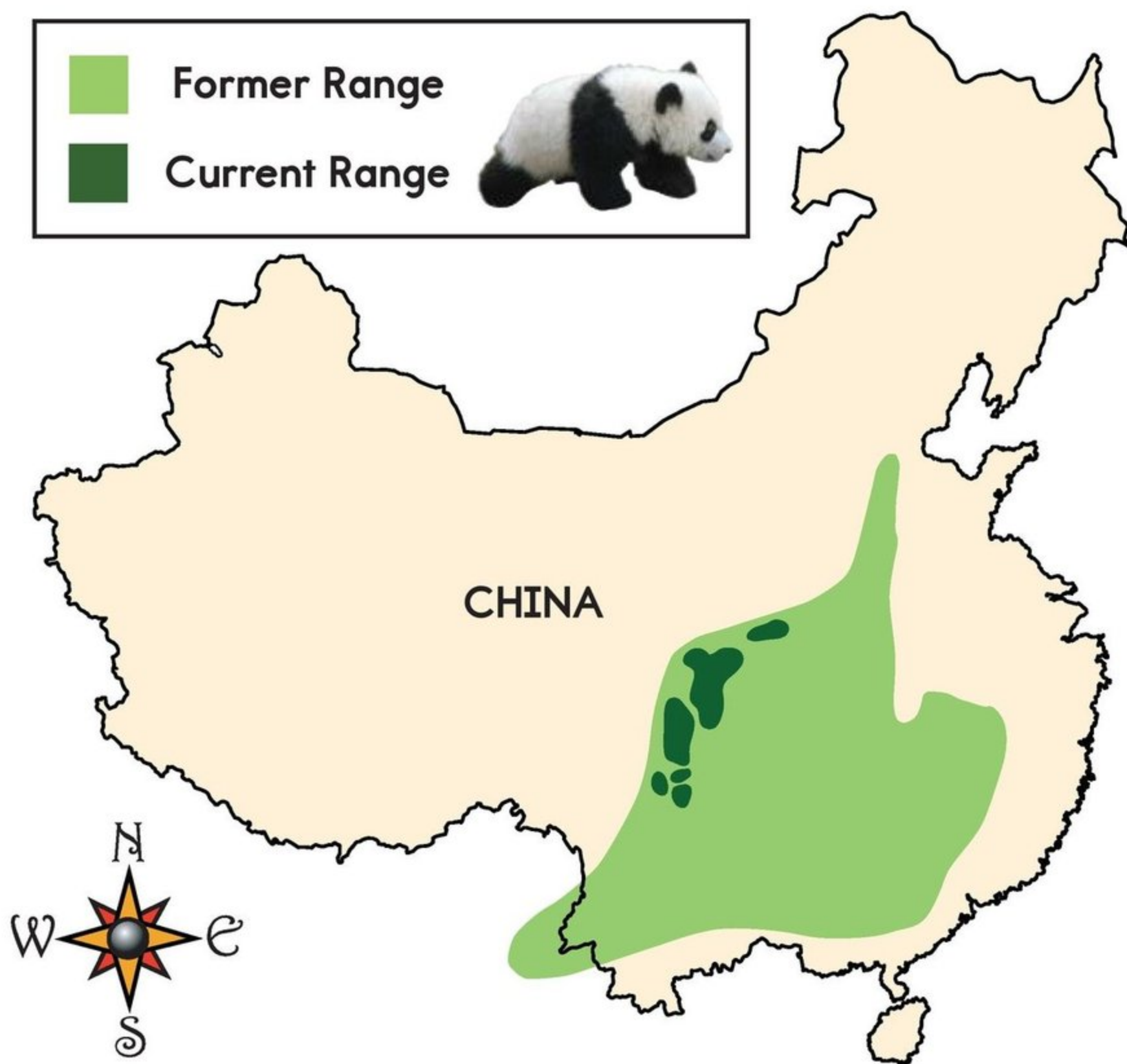
Height on all fours: 70 to 80 cm (28–30 in)
Height standing upright: 170 cm (66 in)
Length: 1.83 m (6 ft)
Weight: 90.7–109 kg (200–240 lbs) in the wild
Pandas in zoos are heavier.
Males are slightly larger than females.

MEET THE GIANT PANDA



Giant pandas are among the most loved animals in the world. Members of the bear family, giant pandas are easily recognizable because of their thick black-and-white fur.

Wild giant pandas remain in only one place on Earth—the forest-covered mountains of western China. They are so rare and **endangered** that they have become a symbol of the effort to protect Earth’s animals.





Pandas munching on bamboo

DO YOU KNOW?

Pandas do not hibernate like other bears do. They must eat year-round to get enough nutrients.

FOOD AND FEEDING



The name panda comes from the language of Nepal, a country near China. *Panda* means “bamboo eater,” and bamboo makes up almost all of a panda’s diet. Bamboo, a kind of grass that grows extremely tall, is plentiful in the cold, damp, high mountains where pandas live.

Bamboo is low in the **nutrients** that pandas need for energy. For this reason, pandas must eat an amazing amount of bamboo in order to get enough nutrients. An adult panda spends as many as sixteen hours a day eating up to 18 kilograms (40 lbs) of bamboo.



A newborn panda is as small as a hamster. A panda mom is 900 times bigger than her baby.

GIANT PANDA LIFE CYCLE



Giant pandas are mammals, and like all mammals, they give birth to live young and nurse them. A female panda begins having cubs when she is five or six years old, and then she gives birth to only one or two cubs every few years. A mother panda must work full-time to care for just one baby. She usually raises only one cub and ignores any others, which then die of neglect.

At birth, newborn pandas are tiny, blind, and completely dependent on their mother's care. Because they are so helpless, they are **vulnerable to predators**. A baby panda develops slowly and cannot walk until the age of four months. It stops nursing and begins eating bamboo by the age of one year.

During the first two years of its life, a panda cub stays close to its mother, learning how to survive in the forest. The cub figures out how to find the best food plants and how to tell friend from enemy when it encounters other animals. A young panda's biggest dangers are leopards and wild dogs.



This panda mother raises two cubs in captivity. Wild panda mothers usually raise only one cub at a time.

A panda is an adult by the age of three, and it can fend for itself without its mother. It settles in an area called a home range, where it feeds alone. Each panda gives other pandas signs to keep away from its home range. One sign is a smelly liquid that the panda releases from its body and rubs on tree trunks. A panda also marks the edges of its home range by scratching the bark of tree trunks.

ARE PANDAS REALLY GIANT?

Giant pandas are actually one of the smaller kinds of bears. They are called “giant pandas” to distinguish them from red pandas, which also live in bamboo forests in China. Turn to page 11 to see a red panda.





Male pandas do not bite or scratch each other when they fight. Instead, they wrestle.

Female pandas usually remain solitary in their home range. Males roam more widely and are more aware of their neighbors. When it is time to mate, males know where to find females and where to find their male rivals. Males fight for the right to mate with a female by pushing and bumping each other in a sort of panda sumo-wrestling match.



Chinese farmers often cut down bamboo forests to make fields.

GIANT PANDA SURVIVAL



Giant pandas are in great danger of becoming **extinct**. No one is sure how many are left because they are hard to locate and study, but scientists believe that only about 1,000 giant pandas are still alive in the wild.

The biggest threat to pandas is the destruction of their forest homes. China's population is growing fast, and bamboo forests are being cleared for wood and farmland. Pandas are also in danger from hunters who want to sell their coats. Pandas are easy targets because they move slowly. The Chinese government now has strict laws to protect pandas, and it has created thirty-four **preserves** to protect their **habitat**.



Scientists raise panda cubs in zoos to help these animals survive.

Many zoos now have panda breeding programs in which scientists are studying how to help pandas survive in the wild. Concerned people around the world are working hard to keep giant pandas alive.



DO YOU KNOW?

The red panda is not a close relative of the giant panda, even though it has a similar name. Red pandas are relatives of raccoons. They live in the same bamboo forests as giant pandas.

GLOSSARY



endangered (<i>adj.</i>)	in danger of dying out completely (p. 4)
extinct (<i>adj.</i>)	completely wiped out (p. 10)
habitat (<i>n.</i>)	the natural environment of a plant or animal (p. 10)
nutrients (<i>n.</i>)	substances in food that nourish the body (p. 5)
predators (<i>n.</i>)	animals that hunt and eat other animals (p. 7)
preserves (<i>n.</i>)	places where animals or plants are protected (p. 10)
vulnerable (<i>adj.</i>)	able to be hurt easily (p. 7)

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