

Why Giant Pandas are Endangered

September 2012

Panda breeding programs continue to struggle, a fact unfortunately highlighted by the recent death of a week old panda cub at the National Zoo on September 23, 2012. Breeding programs are an important part of the panda conservation effort since the adored animals are endangered with only an estimated 1,600 remaining in the wild and about 300 in captivity.

The panda habitat has significantly decreased because the bamboo forests are being cleared as the region becomes more industrialized. Pandas also need a large habitat. They are large animals who consume mostly bamboo so a lot of it is needed to sustain them. The average panda can consume 20 to 30 pounds of bamboo shoots each day. They are also solitary, territorial creatures and do not like to live close to each other.

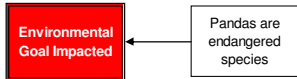
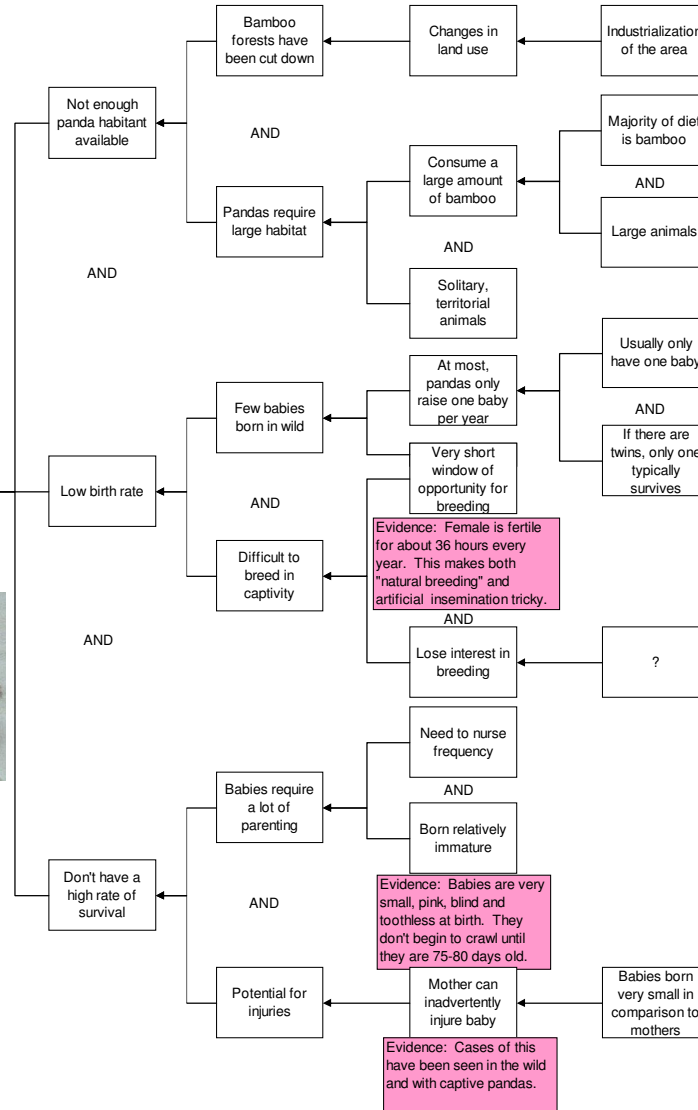


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Cause Map High Level

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Pandas also have a notoriously low birth rate, in the wild and especially in captivity. Female pandas are only fertile once a year for a very short window, about 36 hours. In the wild, pandas have to find a mate (that they don't typically live near) while fertile to produce a cub for the year. Pandas in captivity struggle with conception even when they share an enclosure with a potential mate because they seem to lose interest in "natural breeding". The recent cub born at the National Zoo was the product of artificial insemination. If a panda does manage to conceive, she will still only raise a single cub per year. Most of the time only a single baby is born, but even if twins occur only one usually survives.

Panda cubs that are born also face a high mortality rate. Panda cubs are born very small, about the size of a stick of butter, and very immature. The newborns are helpless, pink and blind and require a lot of care taking to survive. There is also the heart breaking chance that a mother panda can inadvertently injure her cub because she is much larger than her newborn and needs to handle it frequently to nurse it and care for it.

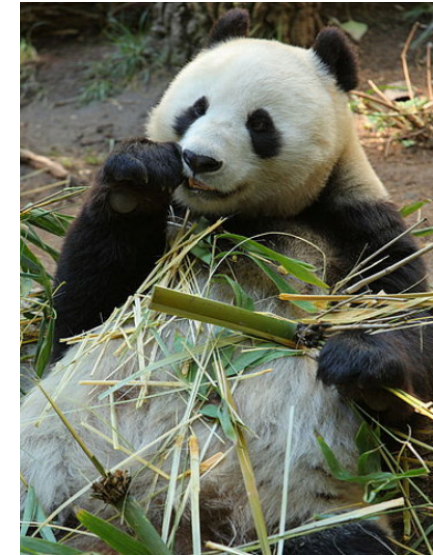


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Why?

Effect ← Cause

NOTE: Read the Cause Map from left to right with the phrase "Was Caused By" in place of each arrow.