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## **New highways threaten giant pandas**

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**6 December, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **New highways threaten giant pandas**

The endangered giant panda faces a new threat to its survival from the increasingly rapid expansion of China's infrastructure. The accelerated implementation of a national highway network is crisscrossing its way through the pandas' natural habitat and carving it into small pieces in the process. This is not only destroying the bamboo-lush terrain the threatened animals depend on for their survival, it is also adding new dangers of being run over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu, where the already fewer than fifty animals seem doomed. Conservationists are fighting an uphill battle to preserve the loveable beasts and can only think of special panda crossings or tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest concern is that the fragmentation of the pandas' habitat will spell doom for them. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of genetics and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some point as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is fertile. This problem is exacerbated somewhat by the males' notorious lack of interest in sex and the females' being overly-picky in choosing her Mr. Right. The expansion of the highways now makes breeding even more difficult. In June 2004, there were only 1,490 giant pandas living in the wild.

## **WARM-UPS**

**1. I'M A PANDA:** Write down three things about your new life as a panda. Walk around the class and meet with the other "pandas". Tell each other about and comment on what you wrote down. How is life at the moment? What are your plans for the weekend? What do you think of the new superhighway that is destroying your forest?

**2. NEW ROADS:** What do you think of the construction of new highways? Put a scale of 1 to 10 next to these opinions. One means you strongly agree, ten means you strongly disagree. Compare and talk about your scoring with your partner(s).

- Fantastic! New highways make life easier for everyone.
- Soon the whole country will be one giant highway system. Not good.
- The answer is not new highways, it's better public transportation.
- New highways should never threaten the survival of animals that live on the land.
- New highways are essential for economic progress.
- New highways mean more pollution. All construction should cease immediately.
- Building new roads is ten times more important than wildlife preservation.
- New highways and animals can live happily, side by side.

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Pandas / threats / survival / highways / natural habitat / bamboo / trucks / conservationists / uphill battles / tunnels / genetics / extinction / the perfect partner*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. THREATS:** What kind of "progress" in our modern world makes you feel bad? Talk with your partner(s) about whether we really need these things and what damage they do or will do to the world:

- Superhighways
- Nuclear power
- Computer games
- Globalization
- English as a world language
- The Internet
- Plastic
- Microwave ovens
- Mobile phones
- The french fry

**5. PANDA:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with pandas. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

**6. QUICK DEBATE:** Have a quick debate with your partner about new roads. Students A think more new roads are needed, Students B think a different transportation system is more important.

## **BEFORE READING / LISTENING**

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. China's road development is further endangering giant pandas.       | T / F |
| b. Pandas depend on eucalyptus shoots for their survival.              | T / F |
| c. In China's Gansu province, 50 pandas were run over by trucks.       | T / F |
| d. Conservationists want to build special panda crossings on roads.    | T / F |
| e. Genetics means a group of less than 50 pandas may become extinct.   | T / F |
| f. Pandas are famous for their love of sex.                            | T / F |
| g. A conservationist named Mr. Right says female pandas are too picky. | T / F |
| h. There are currently 14,900 pandas living in the wild in China.      | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. implementation | choosy          |
| b. crisscrossing  | rich            |
| c. lush           | worsened        |
| d. doomed         | creatures       |
| e. beasts         | intersecting    |
| f. fragmentation  | perfect partner |
| g. exacerbated    | infamous        |
| h. notorious      | completion      |
| i. picky          | condemned       |
| j. Mr. Right      | disintegration  |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. The endangered giant panda              | than fifty animals seem doomed         |
| b. crisscrossing its way through           | the threatened animals depend on       |
| c. destroying the bamboo-lush terrain      | doom for them                          |
| d. the already fewer                       | the pandas' natural habitat            |
| e. Conservationists are fighting an uphill | principles of genetics                 |
| f. ...will spell                           | notorious lack of interest in sex      |
| g. According to basic                      | faces a new threat to its survival     |
| h. a weakening reproductive                | battle to preserve the loveable beasts |
| i. exacerbated somewhat by the males'      | choosing her Mr. Right                 |
| j. the females' being overly-picky in      | ability caused by inbreeding           |

## **WHILE READING / LISTENING**

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

### **New highways threaten giant pandas**

The endangered giant panda \_\_\_\_\_ a new threat to its survival from the increasingly rapid expansion of China's infrastructure. The \_\_\_\_\_ implementation of a national highway network is crisscrossing its \_\_\_\_\_ through the pandas' natural habitat and \_\_\_\_\_ it into small pieces in the process. This is not only destroying the bamboo-lush \_\_\_\_\_ the threatened animals depend on for their survival, it is also \_\_\_\_\_ new dangers of being run over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu, where the already fewer than fifty animals seem doomed. Conservationists are fighting an \_\_\_\_\_ battle to preserve the \_\_\_\_\_ beasts and can only think of special panda crossings or tunnels to help them survive.

*loveable*  
*way*  
*terrain*  
*faces*  
*uphill*  
*accelerated*  
*adding*  
*carving*

The biggest concern is that the fragmentation of the pandas' habitat will \_\_\_\_\_ doom for them. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of \_\_\_\_\_ and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by \_\_\_\_\_." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is \_\_\_\_\_. This problem is exacerbated somewhat by the males' notorious \_\_\_\_\_ of interest in sex and the females' being \_\_\_\_\_ picky in choosing her Mr. Right. The expansion of the highways now makes \_\_\_\_\_ even more difficult. In June 2004, there were only 1,490 giant pandas living in the wild.

*fertile*  
*genetics*  
*overly*  
*inbreeding*  
*spell*  
*point*  
*lack*  
*breeding*

## **LISTENING**

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### **New highways threaten giant pandas**

The endangered giant panda \_\_\_\_\_ a new threat to its survival from the increasingly rapid expansion of China's infrastructure. The accelerated implementation of a national highway network is \_\_\_\_\_ its way through the pandas' natural habitat and carving it into small pieces in the process. This is not only destroying the bamboo-\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ the threatened animals depend on for their survival, it is also adding new dangers of being \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu, where the already fewer than fifty animals seem \_\_\_\_\_. Conservationists are fighting an \_\_\_\_\_ battle to preserve the loveable beasts and can only think of special panda crossings or tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest concern is that the fragmentation of the pandas' \_\_\_\_\_ will \_\_\_\_\_ doom for them. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of \_\_\_\_\_ and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at \_\_\_\_\_ point as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by inbreeding." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is \_\_\_\_\_. This problem is exacerbated somewhat by the males' \_\_\_\_\_ lack of interest in sex and the females' being overly \_\_\_\_\_ in choosing her Mr. Right. The expansion of the highways now makes breeding even more difficult. In June 2004, there were only 1,490 giant pandas living \_\_\_\_\_.

## **AFTER READING / LISTENING**

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'threat'** and **'survival'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "PANDA" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about pandas, conservation and progress in the modern world.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| • faces                  | • spell    |
| • accelerated            | • genetics |
| • lush                   | • point    |
| • <i>The China Daily</i> | • fertile  |
| • doomed                 | • picky    |
| • preserve               | • wild     |

## **DISCUSSION**

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of the giant panda?
- c. Do you think the giant panda is the best animal for the World Wildlife Fund's logo?
- d. Do you think it's right that new highways should place the giant panda in danger of extinction?
- e. Do you think the executives who make the road-building decisions care about conservation?
- f. Who will be blamed when a truck knocks down the last panda in the area and the species becomes extinct?
- g. What alternatives can you think of to building networks of superhighways?
- h. It costs over \$600,000 a year to protect just one giant panda in the wild. Is this right?
- i. What else can we do to help the pandas survive the road building?
- j. When was the last time you faced an uphill battle?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think all road building should stop in and around the giant pandas' natural habitat?
- d. What would you do if a giant highway was built right outside your front door?
- e. Are you optimistic or pessimistic for the pandas' survival?
- f. What do you think news reporters will be saying in the future when it is confirmed that pandas are extinct?
- g. What animal will replace the panda on the WWF logo?
- h. How can humans encourage pandas to breed more successfully?
- i. Are you overly picky in choosing your Mr. or Ms. Right?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## **SPEAKING**

### **PANDA ROLE PLAY:** Should pandas be threatened by road building?

Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role to develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins. Introduce yourself to the other role players.

#### Role A – ECONOMIST

You think the future prosperity of your country is much more important than the survival of pandas. A hard economic fact is that roads are needed to maintain our standard of living. Without roads, we become poorer. Many animals will become extinct for economic reasons. People should accept this.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY ROADS ARE VITAL.

#### Role B – CONSERVATIONIST

You are horrified the pandas’ natural habitat is being ripped up to make roads. It’s criminal. Pandas are already endangered – they don’t need more threats to their survival. The roads are unnecessary. The future of the planet is more important than the roads. If pandas become extinct, the whole world is in trouble. You hate greedy construction company CEOs.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY THE ROADS ARE WRONG.

#### Role C – ROAD CONSTRUCTION COMPANY CEO

Roads are the lifeblood of a country and its economy. Pandas are cute but they cost \$600,000 each a year to protect. We could use that money on children’s education and helping poor people. The roads will improve living standards. Pandas can stay in zoos, where they can be protected forever. People are more important.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY MORE ROADS ARE NECESSARY.

#### Role D – A GIANT PANDA

You are shocked that roads are destroying your terrain. You’ve lost a lot of good bamboo trees. You’ve heard it’s becoming more difficult to mate and have kids. You also have many cousins who have been killed on the roads. And you heard that strange things called money and greed are responsible for the roads. You want people to respect nature and leave it alone.

THINK OF MORE REASONS WHY THE ROAD BUILDING SHOULD STOP.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

Discuss whether or not the road building should stop immediately.

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on giant pandas. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. PROGRESS:** Make a poster outlining the advantages and disadvantages of building roads through forests and jungles. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

**4. LETTER TO A PANDA:** Write a letter to a Gansu panda. Tell him / her what you think of the new roads. Give him advice on how stop to the road building. Also, give him / her some advice on how to breed more successfully. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all think of similar things / advice?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. F      d. T      e. T      f. F      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. implementation | completion      |
| b. crisscrossing  | intersecting    |
| c. lush           | rich            |
| d. doomed         | condemned       |
| e. beasts         | creatures       |
| f. fragmentation  | disintegration  |
| g. exacerbated    | worsened        |
| h. notorious      | infamous        |
| i. picky          | choosy          |
| j. Mr. Right      | perfect partner |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. The endangered giant panda              | faces a new threat to its survival     |
| b. crisscrossing its way through           | the pandas' natural habitat            |
| c. destroying the bamboo-lush terrain      | the threatened animals depend on       |
| d. the already fewer                       | than fifty animals seem doomed         |
| e. Conservationists are fighting an uphill | battle to preserve the loveable beasts |
| f. ...will spell                           | doom for them                          |
| g. According to basic                      | principles of genetics                 |
| h. a weakening reproductive                | ability caused by inbreeding           |
| i. exacerbated somewhat by the males'      | notorious lack of interest in sex      |
| j. the females' being overly-picky in      | choosing her Mr. Right                 |

### GAP FILL:

#### New highways threaten giant pandas

The endangered giant panda **faces** a new threat to its survival from the increasingly rapid expansion of China's infrastructure. The **accelerated** implementation of a national highway network is crisscrossing its **way** through the pandas' natural habitat and **carving** it into small pieces in the process. This is not only destroying the bamboo-lush **terrain** the threatened animals depend on for their survival, it is also **adding** new dangers of being run over by cars and trucks. The *China Daily* reported the biggest threat to the animal is in the northwest province of Gansu, where the already fewer than fifty animals seem doomed. Conservationists are fighting an **uphill** battle to preserve the **loveable** beasts and can only think of special panda crossings or tunnels to help them survive.

The biggest concern is that the fragmentation of the pandas' habitat will **spell** doom for them. The *China Daily* reports that: "According to basic principles of **genetics** and the pandas' reproduction habits, a group of less than 50 giant pandas are predicted to become extinct at some **point** as a result of a weakening reproductive ability caused by **inbreeding**." There are only two days of the year when the female panda is **fertile**. This problem is exacerbated somewhat by the males' notorious **lack** of interest in sex and the females' being **overly** picky in choosing her Mr. Right. The expansion of the highways now makes **breeding** even more difficult. In June 2004, there were only 1,490 giant pandas living in the wild.