

# Kid's KOrner

## China's pandas need bamboo, peace to survive

WASHINGTON — Can the panda be saved? Of course, says zoologist George B. Schaller. "All it needs is bamboo and peace."

Therein lie the difficulties facing China's giant panda. Hunting and destruction of its bamboo forest habitat have drastically shrunk the animal's range so that more than half of the estimated 1,000 survivors live in 12 reserves in southern China. And bamboo is becoming scarce and susceptible to die-offs that starve pandas.

Strangely, the panda prefers meat, and has the simple stomach and short intestines of a carnivore. But meat is hard for the relatively slow panda to obtain, and so it relies on bamboo — loads of it.

### Eats Huge Volumes

Unable to digest bamboo's nutrients efficiently, a panda eats large volumes — 22 to 40 pounds of leaves and stems a day. When on a diet of bamboo shoots, which are 90 percent water, a panda may consume some 650 shoots weighing 85 pounds daily.

The tally of shoots was made by Schaller, director of Wildlife Conservation International, New York Zoological Society, as part of a five-year study by China and the World Wildlife Fund in Wolong Natural Reserve. The research team, led by Schaller and Hu Jinchu, radio-collared 11 pandas to track their activities.

Schaller and his wife, Kay, sometimes endured below-freezing winters in a two-person tent perched high on a ridge. Writing in the March issue of National Geographic, he recalls: "In the glow of a kerosene lantern I tune

the receiver to Long-Long, a young male. He is on my right, down-slope, active. I switch the radio frequency to Ning-Ning...Her signal is calm and consant, the animal momentarily at rest in a ravine not far from Long-Long..."

"Then I recline," writes Schaller, "waiting until it its time to contact the pandas again, each alone in that cold stillness, their coats the color of snow and the darkness between trees. I cannot imagine a loneliness deeper than theirs."

Despite daily expeditions, Schaller observed a panda only on the average of once a month. Over time he determined that the home range of a panda is very small, varying from 1.6 to 2.6 square miles, and is shared with other pandas.

Although the ranges of neighboring females may overlap, each has an area of about 75 to 100 acres in which other females do not seem welcome. Males may share ranges but avoid each other except when competing for females. The animals are active for an average of 14 hours a day, spending most of the time feeding.

Though the first live panda didn't reach the western world until 1936, pandas have been known in China for millennia. "The Classics of Sea and Mountains," a geography book dating back some 2,500 years, says that a "bearlike, black-and-white animal that eats copper and iron lives in the Qionglai Mountains south of Yandao County."

### Chews Cooking Pots

The panda's reputation as an



Sporting a radio collar fitted by scientists, a giant panda leaves a log trap in Wolong Natural Reserve in China's Sichuan Province. Scientists had weighed and measured the panda and then activated the collar so the animal could be monitored 24 hours a day. Some pandas were tracked more than a year.

iron eater probably comes from incidents of entering villages and chewing up cooking pots. Pandas get their ability to chew metal—as well as tough bamboo—from massive jaws and broad molars. Teeth of fossil pandas 3 million years old are similar to those of today's animals, showing that the pact between panda and bamboo has existed probably as long as pandas have.

Bamboo foraging is aided by another feature—a unique sixth digit on the panda's forepaw that affords great dexterity.

Some traits work against pandas. Gestation is long, apparently because of delayed implantation of the fertilized egg. And when they do give birth, usually to two cubs, one cub generally is abandoned and left to die.

The nurturing of young pandas in

the wild can be as mysterious and uncertain as births in captivity. Schaller and his colleagues observed a panda known as Zhen-Zhen mate in April 1981, and they later found she had made a den in the hollow base of a huge fir tree.

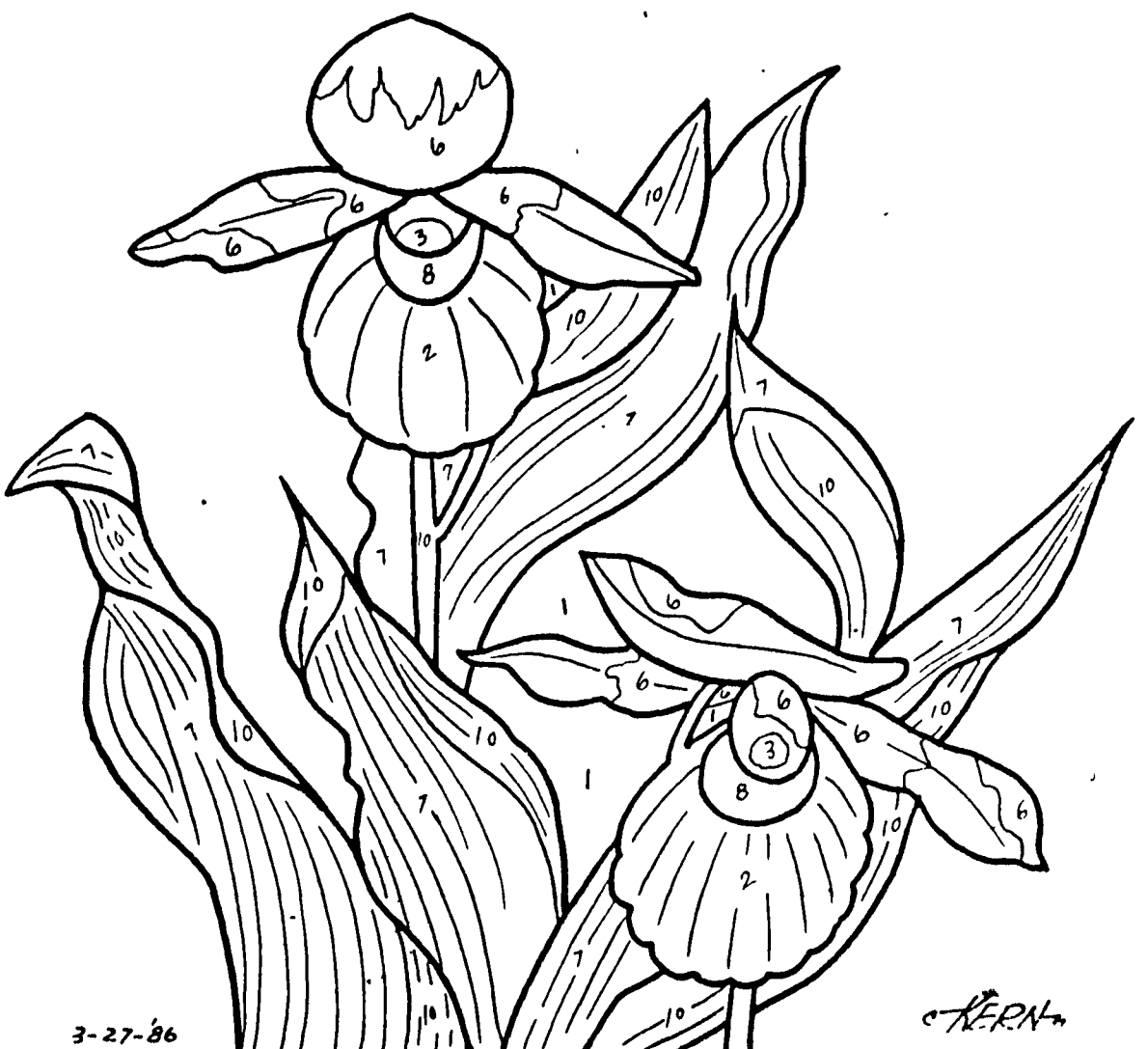
When the scientists approached the den in October, a startled Zhen-Zhen lumbered toward them, screaming. Later they heard an

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## COLOR THIS!

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|-----------|---------------|
| 1. PEACH  | 6. LT. GREY   |
| 2. RED    | 7. GREEN      |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN  |
| 4. BLUE   | 9. LT. BLUE   |
| 5. BROWN  | 10. LT. GREEN |

**SHOWY LADY'S SLIPPER.** THIS FLOWER IS ONE OF AMERICA'S LARGEST ORCHIDS. THE BOTANICAL NAME *CYPRIPEDIUM REGINAE*, MEANS "LADY'S SLIPPER OF THE QUEEN" ACCORDING TO CHRISTIAN LEGEND MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THIS FLOWER WAS ORIGINALLY DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS.



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