

Read the article "Helping Giant Pandas." Then answer the questions.

Helping Giant Pandas

1 People the world over love the black-and-white bears known as pandas. The giant panda is a national treasure in China, and these rare bears are protected by law. Today, only around 1,600 giant pandas survive on Earth. Scientists are working together to find solutions to the problems these beautiful bears face.

2 With so few pandas in the wild, scientists are trying to understand the ways the bears find one another for breeding. Researchers have put special collars on some wild pandas. The collars send signals that the researchers can track. This helps them understand where the pandas are—it's difficult to study an animal that is as hard to locate as a panda! Scientists are also recording sounds pandas make in zoos. Researchers are even testing the scents pandas leave on trees and rocks to try to understand what messages these animals leave with smell.

3 Bamboo is the most important plant in a panda's life, because that is what it eats! Giant pandas eat four or five kinds of bamboo that grow in their home range. Sometimes their food supply is low because after bamboo produces seeds, the entire plant dies. When that happens, pandas move to another area. But now, with humans taking up much of the panda's habitat, pandas are often unable to move to another area and may starve. In some areas, humans have cleared forests to grow only one or two kinds of bamboo, but it is not the kind pandas need to survive.

4 Panda females use hollow tree stumps and stone caves as dens for raising their cubs. As forests are cleared for human uses, there are fewer dens available. San Diego Zoo researchers have been working with Chinese scientists to find out if putting man-made dens in the wild could help solve this problem.

5 Pandas only give birth every two years. Females give birth to one or two cubs, but often the mother can only care for one. China has some pandas in special places where they are cared for by humans. When a female panda gives birth to twins there, the keepers help raise them so both cubs can survive. This has helped the number of pandas in the world to grow.

by David George Gordon

Pandas at Risk

- 1** Scientists estimate that fewer than 2,000 giant pandas live in the mountains of central China. About another 200 pandas live in zoos and breeding stations, mostly in China. Giant pandas are among the most rare of the world's living mammals.

Raising Babies

- 2** "Every newborn panda is important," says Don Lindburg, leader of the giant panda research team at the San Diego Zoo. "After they have grown to adulthood, some of the captive-born bears could be released into the mountainous wilds," he says. Those that mate and give birth to more cubs will help rebuild China's perilously small population of wild pandas.
- 3** "Breeding giant pandas is no easy feat," says Lindburg. Female giant pandas can produce cubs only once every two years. In the wild, an adult female may successfully raise five to eight cubs in her lifetime. By studying pandas in captivity, Lindburg and other scientists are discovering ways to improve the odds for the precious young pandas' survival.
- 4** Giant pandas once wandered freely across China to its eastern coast and from the country's mountaintops to the food-rich valleys below. But as more people made their homes in the valleys and began to farm the land, the naturally shy pandas lost a lot of their habitat and most of their food—the fresh stems, shoots, and leaves of wild bamboo plants.

Hope for the Future

- 5** Today conservation groups, scientists, zoo workers, and the Chinese government work to safeguard what remains of the pandas' habitat. Many think that creating bamboo corridors—strips of undisturbed land through which pandas can comfortably wander and feed—are one hope for saving the

giant panda from extinction. These corridors would connect all of today's smaller panda reserves to create one larger habitat for all wild pandas.

Prompt: Write an essay explaining what has happened to the giant pandas' natural habitat. Explain how the loss of habitat has contributed to the decline of the panda population. Make sure to include evidence from both articles.