



RED PANDA

CARNIVORA
Family: Ailuridae
Genus: *Ailurus*
Species: *fulgens*



Range: eastern Himalayas and southwestern China

Habitat: temperate forests between 7,200 and 15,700 ft altitude; prefers mixed deciduous and conifer forests with old trees and dense understory of bamboo; air is cool and moist.

Niche: Arboreal, primarily folivorous, primarily nocturnal (active from dusk to dawn)

Wild diet: mainly bamboo but also some eggs, birds, insects and small mammals.

Zoo diet: bamboo and primate chow

Life Span: (Wild) 8 – 10 years
(Captivity)

Sexual dimorphism: none

Location in SF Zoo: Children's zoo

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Red pandas or lesser pandas have long, soft reddish-brown fur on the upper parts, blackish fur on the lower parts, and a lighter face with tear markings under the eyes. They have relatively long, furry, non-prehensile tails, marked with about alternating red and buff rings. Their coloring provides excellent camouflage against its habitat of moss- and lichen-covered trees. The head is round; the rostrum is shortened; and the ears are large, erect, and pointed. Long, coarse guard hairs cover the body, and the undercoat is soft, dense, and woolly. The legs are black and the soles of its feet are covered with dense, white hair. This thick body fur serves as thermal insulation on snow-covered or ice surfaces and conceals anal scent glands. Long whiskers help them navigate through dense vegetation at night.

Weight: 7 – 14 lbs
Length: 22 to 25 in
Tail length: 15 to 19 in

The red panda is a specialized bamboo feeder. They must consume a large volume and high-quality (tender leaves and shoots) bamboo to survive as they have difficulty digesting cellulose. They also chew the bamboo thoroughly. They have an extremely low metabolic rate. They have strong, curved and sharp semi-retractile claws for climbing and grasping of narrow tree branches, leaves and fruit. They have a small, bony projection on their wrists that helps them grip bamboo stalks (similar to giant panda). This functions almost like a thumb and greatly aids their grip. When descending a tree headfirst, the red panda rotates its ankle to control its descent, one of the few climbing species to do so. Dental Formula: **I** 3/3, **C** 1/1, **P** 3/3-4, **M** 2/2.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Red pandas are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and is on CITES Appendix I. The population continues to decline and is threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching, and inbreeding depression, although red pandas are protected by national laws in their range countries. There are fewer than 10,000 adult red pandas. Red pandas have a slow rate of reproduction and have a great deal of difficulty recovering from population declines.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Red pandas often communicate using body language such as head bobbing and tail arching. The species is generally quiet except for some twittering, tweeting, and whistling communication sounds.

The red panda is territorial, marking with urine and a weak musk-smelling secretion from their anal glands. They have also been known to use communal latrine sites to stake out territory and share information with others.

They are shy and solitary except when mating and are largely sedentary during the day due to their bamboo diet. It sleeps stretched out on a branch with legs dangling when it is hot, and curled up with its tail over the face when it is cold. Will also sunbathe in the canopy during the day.

If a red panda feels threatened or sense danger, they may try to escape by climbing a rock column or tree. If they can no longer flee, they stand on their hind legs to appear larger and use the sharp claws on their front paws to defend themselves.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

During the mating season, scent-markings increase, and the female invites the male to mount her on the ground. Males leave their scent by urinating or rubbing their anogenital area on trees. Both males and females may mate with more than one partner in a season from mid-January to early March. Females give birth in the spring and summer. Nests are built and located in a hollow tree or a rock crevice. After birth, the mother cleans the cubs and can then recognize each by its smell. She moves the young frequently among several nests, all of which she keeps clean.

Gestation: 135 days	Sexual Maturity: 18 mos
# Mammae: 4 pairs	Weaning Age: 6 – 8 mos
# Young: 1 - 4	Weight at birth: 3.9 to 4.6 oz

MISCELLANEOUS

Ailurus fulgens literally means 'fire-colored cat'; red pandas are considered members of their own family Ailuridae. They were previously placed in the raccoon and bear families. The red panda is considered a living fossil and only distantly related to the giant panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*). Their common ancestor can be traced back to the Early Tertiary period tens of millions of years ago, with a wide distribution across Eurasia. Panda comes from the Nepali word 'ponya,' which means bamboo or plant eating animal. Red pandas select the more tender new bamboo growth of stem and leaf, and chews more fastidiously than the giant pandas.

Sources:

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Walker's Mammals of the World Vol 1 © 1999 Ronald M. Nowak, pgs 695-696

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