

Ⓟ PANDA

NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Bronx Zoo
Bronx, New York 10460
Telephone: (212) 220-5100

New York Zoological Park
New York Aquarium
Center for Field Biology and Conservation
Osborn Laboratories of Marine Sciences

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To whom it may concern:

The People's Republic of China has in recent years become greatly concerned about the conservation of its natural resources, among them several endangered species and their habitats. To insure the survival of such species, World Wildlife Fund International and China established, in 1979, a joint committee to discuss, promote and implement conservation projects.

The first project selected by the Committee is on the giant panda. This choice is highly appropriate for the panda is not only seriously endangered, but also a symbol of world conservation, it being a national treasure of China and the emblem of World Wildlife Fund International. Chinese investigators estimate that only about 1000 pandas survive in the wild, all scattered within a range of only 30,000 sq. km. Over a hundred pandas are known to have died of starvation when in 1976 the bamboo - the panda's principal food-died during its normal 100-year cycle. The bamboo in the central and southern part of the panda's range is expected to die during the 1980's, creating an imminent and urgent conservation problem.

World Wildlife Fund International asked George Schaller of the New York Zoological Society to become the scientific coordinator of the panda project. After lengthy discussions with the Chinese collaborators, the project was divided into 3 parts, all to run concurrently.

1. Field research. Since little is known about movement patterns, food habits, social life and other aspects of the panda's natural history, basic information will be collected throughout the animal's range.
2. Emergency conservation measures. In the event of a bamboo die-off, an effort to rescue starving pandas must be made, and plans for such an emergency are being considered.

3. Captive propagation. Pandas breed poorly in captivity. Only the Peking Zoo has been successful at raising young, a total of 7, one of them the result of artificial insemination. There are about 50 pandas in China's zoos (and another 10 or so outside of China), a waste of animals unless these reproduce. Captives might be induced to breed more with better management, but while techniques are being developed and to insure reproduction in those animals that fail to conceive, an artificial insemination program is essential. Successful captive propagation will not only provide animals for zoos but also for re-introduction to the wild areas where the species has been exterminated.

In a protocol and action plan signed in 1980 by World Wildlife Fund International and the Environmental Protection Office of the People's Republic of China, it was agreed that a foreign artificial insemination expert would be allowed to enter China and collaborate with Chinese scientists in an attempt to inseminate pandas. The captive animals in Sichuan Province were selected for the work.

As scientific coordinator, I invited Stephen Seager to assist with the artificial insemination program. He has experience with pandas and in general is considered the expert in this field of endeavor. The work has to be done in March-April, the normal time when females are in estrus. Dr. Seager, and his co-worker Dr. Chan, have generously agreed to collaborate and the relevant papers have been submitted to the Chinese authorities for approval.

Sincerely,

George B. Schaller
Director
ANIMAL RESEARCH AND
CONSERVATION CENTER

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