



POPULATION IMPROVEMENTS. A researcher stands behind seven panda cubs, all born in 2012, at the Chengdu Panda Base in Chengdu, in southwestern China's Sichuan province, in this October 30, 2012 file photo. The panda population has grown by 268 to a total of 1,864 since the last survey ending in 2003, according to a census by China's State Forestry Administration. (AP Photo/File)

China's latest survey finds increase in wild giant pandas

BEIJING (AP) — Wild giant pandas in China are doing well.

According to a census by China's State Forestry Administration, the panda population has grown by 268 to a total of 1,864 since the last survey ending in 2003.

Nearly three-quarters of the pandas live in the southwestern province of Sichuan. The remaining pandas were found in the neighboring Shaanxi and Gansu provinces.

China began surveying its giant pandas in the 1970s. The latest census began in 2011 and took three years to complete.

The number of giant pandas in captivity grew by 211, more than double the previous survey figure, according to the census released in late February.

The administration said China has set up 27 new preservation areas for giant pandas, contributing to the growth in their numbers.

Economic development remains a threat to the rare animal and its habitat. The survey has found 319 hydropower stations and 832 miles of roads in the giant panda's habitat.

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By Louise Watt
 The Associated Press

Prince William meets elephant on final day of China tour

BEIJING — Prince William fed carrots to an elephant in southwestern China and raised the plight of its African counterparts being killed for their tusks in a recent speech that called on China to do more to deter poaching.

He urged China, which has been criticized for its citizens' demand for ivory as fuelling poaching, to be a global leader in combatting the illegal wildlife trade.

"Ultimately, ending demand for ivory is down to citizens across the world," William told a conference on conservation in Yunnan province, wrapping up the first trip to China by a senior British royal in a generation.

"No tradition or fashion is worth the extinction of an entire species, and no criminal gang should be allowed to destroy any part of nature," the prince said.

The second in line to the British throne spent the day in Yunnan, a tropical region bordering Laos and Myanmar (also known as Burma) that has been the focus of government efforts to stop poaching and reduce conflicts between villagers and elephants that eat their crops.

He commended China for contributing to the protection of wildlife in Africa and welcomed its announcement that it would tighten regulations governing the country's legal trade in ivory. He added that there is "so much more to do," including reducing demand for smuggled products.

He said president Xi Jinping told him of China's intention to do more.

William arrived in China after visiting Japan. He delivered an invitation for Xi to visit Britain this year, met young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and met business entrepreneurs in Shanghai.

Earlier, William visited an elephant sanctuary where he met Ran Ran, a 13-year-old female elephant who was discovered in 2005 with a leg wound caused by an iron clamp trap. Handed carrots by the animal's keeper, William passed them to Ran Ran, who reached for more with her trunk even while her mouth was crammed full.

There are about 250 wild Asian elephants in China, all in Yunnan, according to the province's forestry administration.

The prince, who is patron and president of British charities that campaign against the illegal trade in ivory, also met villagers in Xishuangbanna prefecture to hear how they are adapting to living in close proximity to wild elephants.

He also planted a tree in botanical gardens close to one that his grandfather, Prince Philip, planted when he visited with Queen Elizabeth II in 1986.

China recently banned ivory imports for one year in the



ROYAL VISIT. Britain's Prince William feeds Ran Ran (top photo), a 13-year-old female elephant who was discovered in 2005 with a leg wound caused by an iron clamp trap in Xishuangbanna in southwest China's Yunnan province, during his recent trip to Asia. William highlighted his interest in wildlife conservation on the final stop of his China tour, feeding baskets of carrots to the elephant in the country's southwest. In the bottom photo, Prince William gestures to students while at a Premier Skills football coaching event at Nanyang Secondary School in Shanghai, China. While in China, William also promoted links between the countries in football and film, watching students kick balls around with Premier League-trained coaches ahead of a movie premiere. (AP Photos)

hope that it would help reduce the demand for African tusks and protect wild elephants. There is still no ban on the ivory trade within the country, and conservationists say legal sales provide cover for a thriving black market.

China's illicit trade in ivory began to explode in 2008, when Beijing was permitted to purchase 62 tons of ivory under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species. The purchase was presented as a way to preserve China's traditional artisan ivory carving industry.

After legal pieces appeared in shops, it became a status symbol. Carved ivory has historically been highly prized in China, and its scarcity has turned it into an investment choice akin to gold and silver.

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