



FORTUITOUS FIND. Two tiger cubs investigate a rock along a forest trail while their mother walks past them in the jungle in eastern Thailand. Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation along with two private organizations have announced they have photographic evidence of new tiger cubs in eastern Thailand, supporting a scientific survey that confirmed the existence of the world's second breeding population of the tigers. (Photo/Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation/Freeland via AP)

Thai jungle seen as breeding ground for Indochinese tigers

By **Kaweewit Kaeujinda**
The Associated Press

BANGKOK — Conservationists say they have evidence that the critically endangered Indochinese tiger is breeding in a Thai jungle, giving hope for the survival of an animal whose total population may be less than 300.

Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation along with two private organizations have announced they have photographic evidence of new tiger cubs in eastern Thailand, supporting a scientific survey that confirmed the existence of the world's second breeding population of the tigers. The other breeding ground is in the Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary in western Thailand.

The Thai agency, along with Freeland,

an organization fighting human and animal trafficking, and Panthera, a wild cat conservation group, said only 221 Indochinese tigers are estimated to remain in two Asian countries, Thailand and Myanmar (formerly known as Burma).

It is feared that tigers, which once ranged across much of Asia, are now all but extinct in southern China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and much of Myanmar, the groups said in a joint statement. Indochinese tigers are smaller than the better-known Bengal and Siberian tigers.

"Poaching for the illegal wildlife trade stands as the gravest threat to the survival of the tiger, whose numbers in the wild have dwindled from 100,000 a century ago to 3,900 today," it said.

The statement noted the tigers' "remarkable resilience given wildlife poach-

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From poor eyesight to bad teeth, needs of pandas grow with age

By **Helene Franchineau**
The Associated Press

DUJIANGYAN, China — Failing eyesight, poor digestion, bad teeth, limbs no longer so limber: With captive giant pandas living longer than ever, the list of their physical and even emotional needs is growing.

China, the native home of pandas, is seeking to cater to those requirements with a special home for the old timers along with customized diets, exercise, and other care aimed at improving their quality of life.

"Of course we spend more energy taking care of old pandas," said Xu Yalin, a panda keeper for 19 years at the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda Dujiangyan Base in the southwestern province of Sichuan.

"Every day we need to interact with them closely and check their mental state," Xu said. "We also examine their feces, the shape of it and so on. We worry more about the old pandas than the juveniles."

Pandas are considered old after they turn 20. The current longevity champion, Basi, recently turned 37 and lives in Fujian province in southeast China.

Of the roughly 30 pandas at the base, Xu is responsible for three, all of them over 20 and starting to develop health issues from failing eyesight to poor digestion and teeth worn down by a lifetime of chomping bamboo. Those who can no longer handle coarse bamboo shoots get the more tender leaves instead. They eat, sleep, and do little else, to the delight of the visitors.

One of Xu's charges, a 24-year-old female named Qiao Yuan, gets fruits and smooth corn porridge rather than the



GERIATRIC PANDAS. Keepers cut up bamboo leaves for elderly pandas, some of whom suffer from bad teeth and poor digestion, at the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda Dujiangyan Base, in Sichuan, China. (AP Photo/Helene Franchineau)

wowotou bread made of corn and sorghum that younger pandas receive.

"Another panda, who was rescued from the wild, does not eat bamboo because of his bad teeth, so every day we chop bamboo leaves and mix them with pieces of the corn and sorghum bread with carrots and apples," Xu said. "It's like a bamboo-flavored salad."

Xu visits Qiao Yuan first thing each morning to ensure she had a good night. While feeding her a snack of carrots and apples, she performs several exercises aimed at checking Qiao Yuan's eyesight and teeth. She also has her stand up, to make her stretch her limbs.

Dinner is at 4:00pm — more bamboo and porridge, which Qiao Yuan eagerly slurps up.

"Looking at Qiao Yuan's behavior at her age, you can't help but think about an old human being that has difficulty eating and walking," said Xu. "Taking care of an old panda is just like taking care of an old person."

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