

An An, World's Oldest Giant Male Panda in Captivity, Dies at 35

The animal was euthanized in Hong Kong on Thursday because of his deteriorating health, a statement said.



By Jin Yu Young

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An An, a bamboo-eating resident of Hong Kong's Ocean Park who was known for his feisty, playful nature and who had the distinction of being the world's oldest giant male panda in captivity, died on Thursday after experiencing health problems. He was 35 — or 105 in human years.

The death, by euthanasia, was announced by the park on its Facebook page, which mourned the loss of its “centenarian panda.”

The panda had struggled for weeks with food intake and physical activity, leading park officials, veterinarians and the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda to put him down.

In the last few days of his life, An An was refusing solid foods and becoming more sedentary, officials said. He consumed only water and electrolytes, and his diet swayed far from the daily intake of 30 pounds of bamboo that giant pandas normally eat.

Dr. Paolo Martelli, director of veterinary services at Ocean Park, performed the procedure at An An's park residence, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Sichuan Treasures.

An An arrived in Hong Kong in 1999 with a female companion, Jia Jia. The Guinness World Records listed her in 2015 as the oldest giant panda in captivity. She died in 2016 at the age of 38.

The life spans of pandas in the wild typically fall between 14 and 20 years. Pandas in captivity rarely make it beyond 30. But there are exceptions. In 2020, Xin Xing, a giant panda who resided at Chongqing Zoo in southwestern China and was famous for scarfing down up to 70 pounds of food daily, died at 38. One year for pandas is equivalent to roughly three for humans, according to an Ocean Park conversion.

While giant pandas were listed as an endangered species in 1990 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the organization reclassified the bears as “vulnerable” in 2016. As of last year, there were about 1,800 giant pandas in the wild in China and 500 in captivity worldwide.

There are concerns about the conservation of the animals because of the destruction of their natural habitats, including the Yangtze Basin region in China, from infrastructure development, forest lost and climate change.

While the Chinese government has made restoration efforts to preserve the pandas' natural habitats and has dozens of panda reserves across the country, protection covers only half of their ecosystems, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

As the news of An An's death spread, an outpouring of condolences flowed online from the public. The chairman of the Ocean Park Corporation, Paulo Pong, also mourned the loss, saying in a news release on Thursday that An An had "brought us fond memories with numerous heartwarming moments. His cleverness and playfulness will be dearly missed."

In 2020, Hong Kong's Ocean Park drew global attention when two of its other pandas, Ying Ying and Le Le, both 14 at the time, succeeded at mating naturally after multiple unsuccessful attempts since 2010. The park had shut down as part of Hong Kong's attempts to fight the coronavirus, leaving it free of the usual throngs of gawkers and, perhaps, granting the animals some privacy to mate.