

## MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 14 April 2010

### **WILD GIANT PANDAS MOVED TO AVOID EXTINCTION**

BEIJING—The Chinese Government has begun moving highly endangered giant pandas into the Xiaoxiangling Mountains in south-western China after recent research found they are at high risk of extinction. This is the only the second time wild pandas have been transferred to a new habitat to ensure their survival.

Only 30 pandas are thought to live in this isolated colony, near the city of Chengdu and 1800 km southwest of Beijing, down from an estimated 2570 pandas 250 years ago. If this trend continues giant pandas in the region will soon become extinct.

Scientists led by Fuwen Wei from the Institute of Zoology, part of the Chinese Academy of Science, studied DNA samples and historical information to determine changes in the giant panda population.

The team's findings, published this month in the journal *Conservation Biology*, show that a human population boom around 300 years ago is closely associated with the decrease in giant panda population.

Dr Wei and his team studied DNA samples from panda feces, and were able to determine the current and past populations of the animals.

The research team then used census information from provincial handbooks, and annals from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). According to the research team "the human population during the past 300 years increased sharply in the Xiaoxiangling region".

Changes in taxation laws and human migration patterns led to a rapid increase in human population, while agricultural developments led to heavy deforestation.

Current giant panda habitat is only three percent of the area it was prior to the rise in human population. Satellite images from the last 30 years confirm a loss of habitat.

Giant pandas are only found in China, and are considered charismatic by people around the world. Conservation efforts in the past have focused on protecting bamboo forests, captive breeding and illegal poaching.

ENDS

Note to editors

Kēxué Communications is a scientific communication company headquartered in Beijing, China that works with Chinese researchers, organizations, education centers and media to assist in the dissemination of science within China and abroad.

For more information, interviews, or images please contact:

Dr Fuwen Wei: weifw@ioz.ac.cn, +86 6480 7152 or

Ben Bravery: info@kexuecommunications.com, +86 13718168728