Care For Us
Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral, or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioral, health, and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.
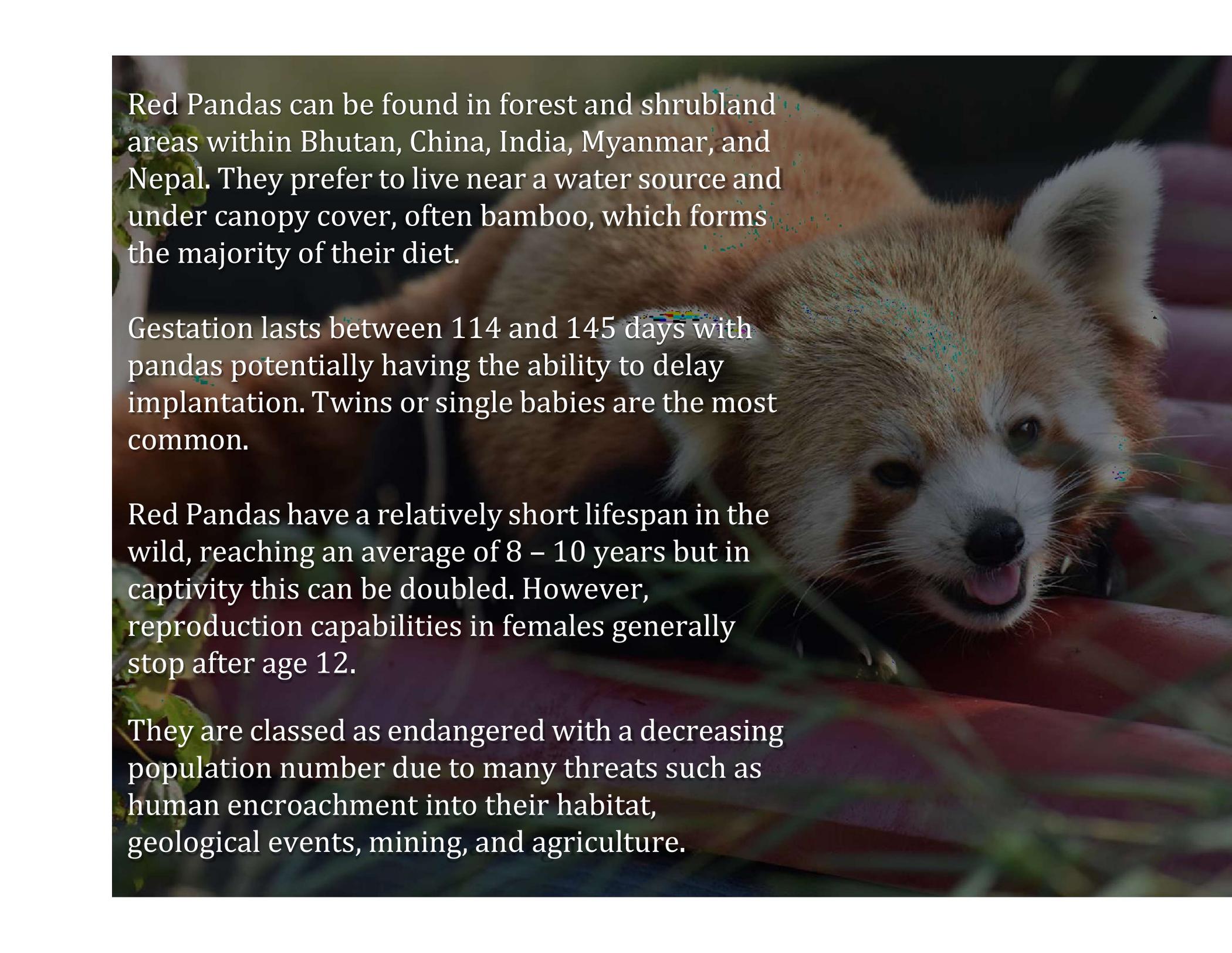
A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.

Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry provisions for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

Red Pandas can be found in forest and shrubland areas within Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, and Nepal. They prefer to live near a water source and under canopy cover, often bamboo, which forms the majority of their diet.

Gestation lasts between 114 and 145 days with pandas potentially having the ability to delay implantation. Twins or single babies are the most common.

Red Pandas have a relatively short lifespan in the wild, reaching an average of 8 – 10 years but in captivity this can be doubled. However, reproduction capabilities in females generally stop after age 12.

They are classed as endangered with a decreasing population number due to many threats such as human encroachment into their habitat, geological events, mining, and agriculture.

Red pandas need shade

Overheating is a problem for captive pandas therefore shade and areas to cool off are vital for their health. The rate of infant mortality is significantly increased when areas of shade are not provided. Red pandas also benefit from having places to be able to hide away from people that are cool and shady. At least 50% of an enclosure should be in the shade and the enclosure should not be hot and humid.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Providing multiple shady areas for pandas to choose from will prevent overheating and encourage exploration, as well as natural thermoregulation. Natural planting which provides shade can also encourage foraging behaviors.

Red pandas like trees

They are arboreal and will rest and sleep in trees as well as using them to move around. They will always descend trees headfirst and use their claws for grip, and their tails for balance. Red pandas also use trees to help them thermoregulate when they are resting, for example, they will spread out on a branch when too hot.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Climbing opportunities should be encouraged through the inclusion of trees, platforms, and connected branching within enclosures. Having this branching at a higher height is an important factor for pandas to feel secure. Natural materials such as wood rather than metal should be used for climbing structures to allow for grip. The provision of appropriate branching will encourage exploratory and investigative behaviors, as well as an opportunity to wear claws down and utilize muscles for climbing.

Red pandas prefer to be alone

Red pandas are generally solitary in the wild with adults only mixing for breeding. In captivity they can live together as a breeding pair but the male must be separated from the female before she gives birth. Bachelor groups of males can work if each individual is mixed before reaching 1 year old. The provision of visual barriers, space for individuals to get away from each other, more nest boxes than there are pandas, and multiple feeding sites should reduce the potential for aggression.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Keeping pandas in appropriate social groupings and providing enough space and resources for each panda can encourage peaceful interactions between individuals and minimize the risk of aggression.

Red Pandas have specific diets

95% of the diet should be leaves and shoots with the vast majority of this being bamboo. They also occasionally eat fruit, roots, succulent grasses, acorns, lichens, birds' eggs, and insects. They should always have access to a variety of fresh leaves and food should be offered several times a day due to their continuous feeding strategy. Protein sources should be offered once a week but demand for this can increase during late pregnancy and lactation. Fruit should be kept to a minimum to ensure good fecal consistency.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Foraging behaviors can be encouraged through providing food in a variety of different places within an enclosure and changing these locations often. Scatter feeds around the enclosure and changing the presentation of food can all help keep a panda engaged within its environment.

Red Pandas like to rest and sleep

Red pandas are crepuscular therefore are most active at dusk and dawn. They prefer to sleep through the hottest part of the day and will rest in between bouts of feeding. Resting and sleeping should be encouraged through the provision of ideal nest boxes which provide good drainage, use comfortable substrates such as straw, are at a cool temperature, are away from, and have protection from the elements.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Sleeping and resting platforms, and boxes can be created and dispersed around the enclosure to give the pandas a choice of where to sleep. Providing sleeping sites which are free of disturbance will encourage sleeping and resting behaviors.

Red Pandas are sensitive to disturbance

Red Pandas can become easily disturbed by loud noises, human disturbance, and heat stress. If they are forced into close-proximity with humans without means of escape, they will become stressed. Equally if their enclosure is not suitable to meet all their environmental and behavioral needs, the welfare experienced by the pandas will decrease. Coping behaviors such as stereotypical pacing can be seen in extreme cases. To avoid stress, they should be kept at a distance from other carnivores and predators.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Pandas can be encouraged to sleep and rest through the provision of quiet areas, free from excessive noise or human disturbance and which allow for uninterrupted periods of sleeping for the pandas. Providing space, choice, stimulation, and the encouragement of natural behaviors are all vital to ensure the welfare of red pandas.

Red Pandas enjoy choice and control over their environment

Providing choices of different nest boxes (more than the number of pandas), choices of food (for example different species of bamboo), and various aspects of their enclosure which they can explore and make use of will ensure optimum welfare for captive red pandas.

Positive Behaviors to Encourage

Exploration within their habitat can be encouraged through occasional changes to furniture and the provision of enrichment devices.

Red Pandas enjoy...

A suitable environment that promotes all their natural behaviors, a selection of leaves to eat, and quiet places for sleeping and resting.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviors, so they are happy and health throughout their lives.