



The Last Panda

By George B. Schaller

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Dependent on a shrinking supply of bamboo, hunted mercilessly for its pelt, and hostage to profiteering schemes once in captivity, the panda is on the brink of extinction. Here, acclaimed naturalist George Schaller uses his great evocative powers, and the insight gained by four and a half years in the forests of the Wolong and Tangjiahe panda reserves, to document the plight of these mysterious creatures and to awaken the human compassion urgently needed to save them.

"No scientist is better at letting the rest of us in on just how the natural world works; no poet sees the world with greater clarity or writes about it with more grace. . . . Anyone who genuinely cares for wildlife cannot help being grateful to Schaller--both for his efforts to understand the panda and for the candor with which he reports what has gone so badly wrong in the struggle to save it from extinction."--Geoffrey C. Ward, *New York Times Book Review*

"Schaller's book is a unique mix of natural history and the politics of conservation, and it makes for compelling reading. . . . Having been in giant panda country myself, I found some of the descriptions of the animals and habitats breathtaking. Schaller describes the daily routines and personalities of the giant pandas he studied (as well as their fates thereafter) as though they were his blood relatives. . . . Schaller's brilliant presentation of the complexities of conservation makes his book a milestone for the conservation movement."--Devra G. Kleiman, *Washington Post Book World*

"George Schaller's most soulful work, written in journal style with many asides about a creature who evolved only two to three million years ago (about the same time as humans). . . . Here, conservation biology confronts an evil that grinds against hope and shatters the planet's diversity. Written with hope."--*Whole Earth Catalog*

"A nicely crafted blend of wildlife observation and political-cultural analysis. . . . *The Last Panda* is a sad chronicle of our failure, so far, to stem the decline of the

animal that may be the most beloved on the planet."--Donald Dale Jackson,
Smithsonian

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Only George Schaller, the intrepid and clear-eyed biologist and author, could have written this book. In 1980 Schaller became the first foreigner allowed to study the panda in its native habitat, in China's Sichuan Province. Five years later he emerged shaken and angered by what he saw as mismanagement leading to the panda's decline. Schaller is unafraid to criticize the Chinese government, the U.S. government, even the World Wildlife Fund, which uses the panda as its logo. This beautiful, passionate book shows that, sadly, even a species as well-known and well-loved as the panda faces a grim future in modern Asia.

From Publishers Weekly

From 1980 to 1985 Schaller (*The Mountain Gorilla*) was engaged in field research on the giant panda, in a joint project of the Chinese government and the World Wildlife Fund. He gives a riveting account of his experiences on two levels: observing pandas in their natural and dwindling habitat while simultaneously coping with bureaucratic obduracy, mismanagement, carelessness and lack of commitment among most of the Chinese scientific team. From a rugged camp at the Wolong panda reserve in Sichuan province, Schaller and his wife, Kay, monitored pandas, documenting their travels, courtships, births and deaths. They also tracked red pandas, golden monkeys and takins (relatives of the musk-ox). The project revealed the fragmented habitat of the pandas, which exist in isolated populations threatened by local poaching and depredation of the bamboo forests. Today, fewer than 1000 giant pandas live in the wild. Schaller discusses the "rent-a-panda" scheme, whereby Western zoos pay huge sums to China to "borrow" pandas for exhibit. In 1989 the WWF published a conservation strategy for the panda; it has yet to be implemented. Schaller's account offers a striking example of the conflict between politics and conservation. Photos.
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From Library Journal

In this book, Schaller, the author of *The Giant Pandas of Wolong* (LJ 6/1/85) and many popular accounts of his field research on such animals as lions and gorillas, describes a World Wildlife Fund-sponsored study of the giant panda, carried out in cooperation with Chinese scientists throughout the 1980s. As the title suggests, the panda faces the same problems as beloved but endangered animals everywhere: loss of habitat, poaching, ready markets for pelts as status symbols, breeding problems and "rent a panda" policies in zoos, and indifferent bureaucrats at every level. An unusual aspect of the panda problem is the periodic die-off of bamboo, the animal's main diet; Schaller describes the worldwide confusion and concern about pandas caused by the flowering of bamboo in the mid-1980s. Americans are still crazy about pandas, as the dismay over the recent death of Ling-Ling at Washington's National Zoo demonstrates. Schaller's reserved and faintly depressed tone does not make for lively reading, but he has an important story to tell. For most libraries.

- *Beth Clewis, Prince William, P.L., Va.*

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