

'Granny panda' celebrates 'centennial' birthday as she turns 35

A zoo in southwest China on Saturday threw a centennial birthday party for its celebrity "granny panda" who turns 35.

Xinxing, born in 1982, is one of the oldest giant pandas in the world. She is the matriarch of a huge panda family of 90. Her children and grandchildren are spread across the globe in 20 countries and regions including the United States, Canada and Japan.

On Saturday, Xinxing was treated with a feast of bamboo shoots and apples in the Chongqing Zoo. The song "happy birthday to you" was being played as she ate. Her offsprings in the zoos of Hong Kong, Toronto and Memphis followed the human's tech fashion to send their greetings via online video clips.

But the grandma does not live alone. She is accompanied by a son, five grand-daughters and two great grand-children at the zoo.

Xinxing was brought to the zoo at one-year-old. Her first birth was in 1992. In 2002, she broke the record of old-age pregnancy for panda when she gave birth to a twin at 20.

Her care-taker Yin Yanqiang said Xinxing remains fit at 35 and has not developed any serious aging problems.

She weights 94 kilograms and eats 15 kg bamboo shoots and 1 kg bamboo leaves on average and plenty of fruits as well as refined feeds three times a day, Yin said.

The zoo has specially arranged for her purified water to drink and monthly physical check-ups. All aims to help Xinxing have a wonderful senior life, Yin added.

Giant pandas are known to have very low birth rates. In the wild, pandas normally live 15 to 20 years. The ones in captivity can live up to around 30 years, equivalent to 90 human years.

According to China's State Forestry Administration, as of the end of 2013, there were fewer than 2,000 pandas living in the wild, mainly in the mountains of the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu. Another 400 or so lived in captivity.

Earlier this week, the world's oldest captive panda Basi died in China at the age of 37. Basi was the model for the mascot of the 1990 Beijing Asian Games, Pan Pan, which has become a household name.