

# North China panda celebrates 11th birthday

Female giant panda Sijia celebrated her 11th birthday Saturday, one year after she and her playmate Youyou moved to their new home in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province.

About 1,500 visitors joined in Saturday's celebration. Sijia enjoyed a rose-shaped ice cake at the ski resort of Yabuli, thousands of kilometers from their home in Sichuan Province.

Sijia and Youyou moved to Yabuli last July. Of all of China's pandas, the two live the furthest north. Pandas in Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland are 1,200 km further north, but the climate there is much less harsh.

Wei Rongping, scientist with the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda, said the resettlement of the pair was an attempt to expand the range of the species and could help researchers better understand the living conditions of pandas at high latitudes.

"The pair has adapted well to the local climate," said Yan Hongbin, who feeds the pandas. Last December, the pair enjoyed their first winter and played cheerfully outdoors when a blizzard dumped 40 cm of snow on the ski resort of Yabuli.

Pandas were downgraded from "endangered" to "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in September last year thanks to continued efforts to protect the species by Chinese scientists.

But the number of pandas living in the wild is still fewer than 2,000 and around 400 lived in captivity as of the end of 2013, according to data from China's State Forestry Administration.