



ANIMAL FACTS & FIGURES

Rare Glimpse Of Endangered Species

(NAPS)—In late August of 1999, scientists at the San Diego Zoo marked a rare event they had struggled for years to bring about: the birth of a giant panda outside of China. It made headlines around the world.

But the time for celebration was not yet at hand. Five other pandas had been born in the United States—and none had lived past the fourth day.

Against the odds, however, this tiny newcomer, Hua Mei, grew and thrived, and her survival has become a hallmark of the desperate international quest to save the giant panda, perhaps the most visible symbol of the world's endangered animals.

Like most endangered mammals, the giant panda is imperiled because its natural habitats—in this case, the bamboo forests of China—are dwindling in size under human influence. But the panda's plight is exacerbated by the animal's dependence on a single food source, bamboo, and by its very solitary nature and the inordinate difficulties of breeding pandas in captivity.

Americans' awareness of pandas and their plight was sharply heightened 28 years ago, when, in the thick of the cold war, China presented a gift of two pandas to the National Zoo in Washington. It was hailed around the globe as a sign of international cooperation in pursuit of a common ecological goal.

Since then, four North American zoos—including those in Atlanta and Mexico City as well as San Diego and Washington—have worked closely with one another and with the Wolong Research and Conservation Center in China to advance the cause of pandas both in captivity and the wild.

Thirteen/WNET New York's *NATURE* series on PBS, with the aid of exclusive footage from the World Famous San Diego Zoo, as the institution is formally known,



Hua Mei with her mother, Bai Yun, at the San Diego Zoo.

captures all the tense drama of Hua Mei's birth and her survival through infancy in *The Panda Baby*, premiering Sunday, April 1 at 8 p.m., ET (check local listings).

The program explores the inspiring successes and heart-breaking failures of efforts on behalf of giant pandas, with a special focus on the San Diego Zoo's dramatic breakthrough with Hua Mei. It vividly illustrates Hua Mei's key role in helping scientists unravel the mysteries of panda breeding.

The Panda Baby was produced by Thirteen/WNET New York. Producer and director: Sandy Ostertag. Executive producer: Fred Kaufman.

NATURE has won more than 200 honors from the television industry, parents groups, the international wildlife film community and environmental organizations.

The series is made possible in part by Park Foundation. Major corporate support is provided by Canon U.S.A., Inc., Ford Motor Company, and TIAA-CREF. Additional support is provided by the nation's public television stations.