

Chinese Pandas Fed Homemade Chicken Soup to Fight Off Holiday Stress
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BEIJING — Everyone needs some chicken soup for the soul — even pandas. The Wuhan Zoo in central China has been feeding its two pandas home-cooked chicken soup twice in a month to reduce stress and give them a nutritional boost, a zoo official said Friday.

He Zihua said 3-year-old Xiwang and Weiwei — literally meaning "Hope" and "Greatness" — were tired and suffering from a little shock since the start Monday of the weeklong National Day holiday, one of the biggest travel seasons of the year.

On Wednesday, up to 30,000 people swarmed the zoo and about 1,000 tourists packed the panda enclosure, shouting to get the animals' attention, He said. The pandas paced restlessly.

"They had been getting less sleep, and they had to run around more," he said. "We felt it would be good to give them the soup because they were fatigued and had a bit of a shock."

Reflecting the Chinese tradition of drinking slow-cooked chicken soup for health, the zookeepers boiled roosters in water overnight and added a pinch of salt to the concentrated stock. The pandas were served 2.2 pounds of soup in giant dishes, in addition to their regular diet of bamboo, milk and buns, He said.

It was a hit.

"They drank it all like they drank their milk. They loved it," he said.

Pandas' diets usually consist mostly of bamboo, but they also can eat meat and He said in the wild they sometimes catch insects and small birds.

Xiwang and Weiwei arrived at the Wuhan Zoo in June from the Wolong Nature Reserve in neighboring Sichuan province. The facility relocated most of its pandas after being damaged by a magnitude-7.9 earthquake on May 12.

The pair were first fed chicken soup on Sept. 28 to help them brave the upcoming cold weather.

"Autumn is coming and we wanted them to have some more nutrition. It will be easier for them to pass the winter," He said. "We just wanted to see whether they liked the soup and whether it's good for their strength and whether they would have stomach problems."

When none appeared, the broth was served for a second time this week.

He said Dudu, another panda at the zoo, lived on milk and ground meat in the last 10 years of his life because his teeth could no longer tear at tough bamboo stalks. He died in 1999.

The giant panda is an unofficial national symbol of China. Only about 1,600 pandas live in the wild, mostly in Sichuan. An additional 180 have been bred in captivity, many of them at Wolong, and scores have been loaned or given to zoos abroad, with the revenues helping fund conservation programs.


