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Red Panda

Biology and Conservation of the First Panda

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Chapter 2 - People and Red Pandas: The Red Panda's Role in Economy and Culture

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Publisher Summary

This chapter focuses on the red panda's role in economy and culture. Despite its striking appearance, the red panda seems to have had only limited impact on the culture, traditions or economy of the Himalayan region. The 1994 IUCN SSC Action Plan for Procyonids and Ailurids concluded that, although the red panda is acknowledged as the state animal of Sikkim and its image was also used to promote the first International Tea Festival in Darjeeling, it does not form part of the culture or folklore of any of its range states. To an outsider it is difficult to understand why such a notably beautiful creature has managed to make so little impression on the traditions of its homelands. On the other hand, considering that the red panda's habitat is relatively inaccessible and that these animals are essentially nocturnal or crepuscular in their habits, this lack of impact becomes easier to appreciate. Further study has indicated that the Action Plan was not

entirely correct in its conclusions; the red panda does indeed have a place in the culture of its range states, albeit a limited one. What perhaps is more surprising is the effect that the red panda seems to be having on modern culture, particularly outside of its range states. Apparently, mass travel and the Internet have at last brought the red panda to the attention of the general public and today its image and its name play a significant role in culture, art, and merchandising around the world, which is surprising given that most people claim that they are unaware of the red panda's existence.

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