

Red Pandas Safely Returned To Exhibit After Alert Animal Keeper Observes Them Outside Enclosure

SEATTLE— At approximately 8:30 p.m. on December 26, an animal keeper working near the red pandas exhibit spotted an animal scurrying in a behind-the-scenes service area and observed that the animal was a red panda. It was quickly determined that both red pandas were outside of their enclosure.



It appears that the two pandas were on a small tree branch, which broke and landed just outside of their exhibit. Prior to introducing the young red pandas to the exhibit in November, the habitat was carefully evaluated for any hazards or escape possibilities.

Security, additional animal care managers and keepers were immediately contacted and responded to the zoo. Thanks to the alert observation and quick actions of the original animal keeper, both red pandas were under constant observation and monitoring by Woodland Park Zoo employees until they were safely returned to their exhibit.

Red panda Zeya (ZAY-uh) climbed a tree adjacent to the red panda enclosure. She was quickly lured down with food and safely returned to her habitat around midnight.

Red panda Ila (EE-la) traveled a short distance and climbed a tall tree. For her safety, animal care and security staff secured the area and waited for Ila to climb down of her own choosing so that she didn't become startled and fall. Red pandas have a natural instinct to climb, and mornings are the time of day when Ila would typically begin to stir for breakfast. Animal care team members used Ila's favorite treat, apples, and other food items to encourage her to climb down. At approximately 11:40 a.m., the red panda climbed down the tree and was safely returned to her enclosure.

Both red pandas are being monitored by their animal care team to ensure their behavior is normal and they did not sustain any injuries. Throughout the incident, the safety of the red pandas was the sole concern, as red pandas pose little threat to people or other animals. One animal keeper sustained a small bite and scratches to her hand while helping secure Ila.

Being in a park-like setting, Woodland Park Zoo is flush with trees and foliage. Exhibits with tall trees and long branches are routinely checked to ensure all animals are safe and unable to leave their habitats. The red panda exhibit is being rechecked as a precaution.

The 6-month-old red pandas were born June 19, 2018, to mom Hazel and dad Yukiko. Zeya, Ila and mom Hazel were introduced to the public outdoor exhibit in November,

where they have had had daily access to their outdoor yard as they continue to develop their motor skills and agility, including climbing trees and lying in an elevated hammock. Red pandas share the name of giant pandas, but more closely resemble raccoons. Recent studies suggest they are closely related to skunks, weasels and raccoons. An endangered species, fewer than 10,000 red pandas remain in their native habitat of bamboo forests in China, the Himalayas and Myanmar, and share part of their range with giant pandas.

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