

O.C. tech firm helps save giant pandas

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*Yun Zi, the San Diego Zoo's only remaining panda cub, turned one year old in August.
Photo by Ken Bohn, San Diego Zoo*

China's critically endangered pandas are receiving some high-tech help: the Irvine semiconductor company, Broadcom, is teaming up with the San Diego Zoo to provide computers and volunteers for breeding efforts in China, and funding in the United States.

Broadcom will provide 61 laptops to China's Wolong National Nature Reserve, where giant pandas are being bred for eventual release into the wild. The \$4.5 billion company, based in Irvine, also will provide volunteer tech support from among its 400 employees in China.

The company's help was formally acknowledged at a ceremony in Beijing Tuesday.

"Technology is essential for protecting endangered species," said Paula Golden, executive director of the Broadcom Foundation — pandas included.

"There are so few of them, and their environment is so stressed, that this has been a focus for the San Diego Zoo," she said. "That sort of opened the door for us."

The computers will be used to, among other things, track wild pandas using GPS data to learn more about their behavior and their habitat needs.

The Broadcom Foundation also will be providing an undisclosed amount of funding to help with panda breeding efforts at the San Diego Zoo.

It is the tech company's first venture into endangered species conservation.

"The panda is a beloved symbol for many people in China," Golden said. "We thought it would be nice for our employees to have something they could be very proud of in their country."

Giant pandas are among the zoo's most popular animals, oozing with charisma. They're also among the world's most imperiled animals. Only about 1,600 survive in the wild.

The zoo also breeds pandas, but to study their behavior and requirements, not to release them into the wild, said Ron Swaisgood, co-head of the zoo's giant panda conservation unit.

The breeding pair is on loan to the zoo from China, which will remain for at least another four years. The female has produced five cubs, and all but one have been sent back to the panda center in China.

The remaining cub, Yun Zi, shown above, is now a year old.

While the species is troubled, the warm public response to the pandas at the zoo helps generate support for conservation efforts, Swaisgood said.

"What we often like to say is, pandas are great ambassadors for their own conservation," he said. "They are such an incredibly appealing animal. They very easily endear themselves to the heart of the public. Pandas are an easy sale. People love pandas."



Broadcom CEO Scott McGregor, second from left, shares a toast in Beijing Tuesday with Broadcom China country manager Frank Liang, left, Wang Penyan of China's Wolong Nature Reserve, and professor Wei Fuwen, right, of the Zoology Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.