

NATURE



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RED PANDAS DON'T HAPPEN EASILY.

## GIGI GOES HOME

Written and Directed by **John Capener and Upma Bhatnagar**  
Executive producers: **Sabine Holzer, Walter Köhler**  
**1 x 50 min., 4K, 5.1. + Stereo**





**Threatened by habitat loss and their own outrageous cuteness, red pandas are close to being extinct in the wild. This film follows a re-introduced youngster during her first year on her own in the stunning mountain forests on the India-Nepal border.**

**R**ed Pandas are perhaps the cutest animals on the planet, sometimes looking more like living cuddly toys than real animals. But this adorability is proving disastrous as new-born babies are routinely stolen from their nests for the pet trade.

Estimates say the global population is perhaps 10,000 and falling. But not enough is known about wild red pandas to reliably count them. There could be as few as 2,500!

Whatever the number is, it's small. And the mighty Brahmaputra River splits it in half – dividing China from the forests of Bhutan, Nepal and India. These populations are fragmented again by natural and man-made divides – leaving the red panda fighting against massive odds.

Luckily, positive steps are being taken in two national parks on the Indian side of the beautiful Kanchenjunga Mountains. An innovative program has seen numbers go from near zero to around 60 – that we know about.

This autumn, a young panda named Gigi will be the latest in an elite group of captive-bred red pandas to be released here. With unprecedented access, the film will be a deeply emotional story of an abundantly beautiful but fragile animal – from the first sneeze at the time of birth to its long walk to its home in the Himalayas.

There she'll have to learn to find food, avoid predators but also find other pandas. But her biggest

challenge comes from misguided human love. Red panda cubs are cruelly plucked away from the cosy nests their mothers build in tree holes. In the 1990s, marauders were collecting as many as 300 red pandas from one area in a year. Laws have come in to stop (or at least reduce) this problem. But when they disappeared completely from the Kanchenjunga forests, the Darjeeling breeding centre started raising them in captivity.

Unfortunately, the red panda response to threat is to become even more endearing – standing on their back legs and putting their paws in the air. Rising up to their full height of two feet tall might intimidate other pandas, but it's no defence against a poacher. Or a snow leopard.

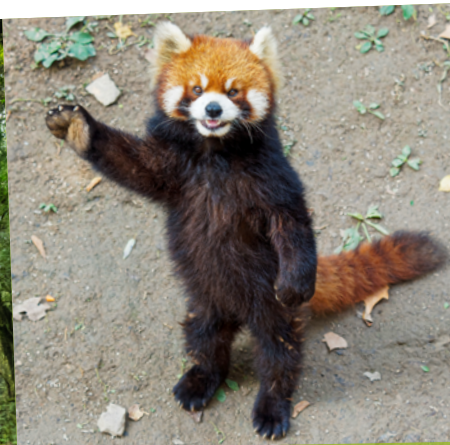
Also, red pandas don't happen easily. Their mating period is short: January to February. Females are

fertile only for one or two days in a year, and the gestation period is long: 112 to 158 days. Females won't mate again for the next two years. While there can be as many as four cubs in a litter, about half of them don't make it beyond three days. For those that do, the constant search for bamboo will become their new main problem. They need to eat this low-nutrient food most of the time they're awake.

These obstacles mean more red pandas are lost every year than are born. Despite these terrible odds, the Darjeeling breeding centre has been able to bring the number from 5 to 27 – over a gruelling 30 years of effort. Gigi's release into her new home, therefore, is a cause for huge celebration.

Despite their presence in zoos around the world, we know very little about them in the wild. **GIGI GOES HOME** will be the first comprehensive look at the life of a red panda. We'll see breeding, birth, motherly care and early years in the breeding centre – but it will be Gigi's journey and first year in the wild that will teach us most. Will she find food? Shelter? And other pandas?

A production of Optimum Television /  
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