Proceedings of ICEGEE 2025 Symposium: Sensor Technology and Multimodal Data Analysis
DOI: 10.54254/2753-8818/2025.AU24104

Several Major Impacts of Climate Change on the Giant Panda

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Abstract: A symbol of China, the giant panda, which is also called Ailuropoda melanoleuca, is becoming more susceptible to the consequences of climate change. This paper compiles recent studies on how the panda's survival is impacted by changing temperatures, modified rainfall patterns, and habitat fragmentation. Projected changes in the distribution of *Bashania fargesii*, a main bamboo species eaten by pandas, were analyzed using species distribution models (SDMs), ecological forecasting, and bioclimatic data. This paper discovered a northward movement of ideal habitats under both moderate and severe climate scenarios (RCP4.5 and RCP8.5). By 2100, mechanistic models projected a 62% drop in climate-appropriate habitats for pandas, to be accompanied by at least 500-meter elevation changes. Comparative research with sympatric mammal species also showed that while pandas might not suffer the most severe habitat loss, their low mobility and dietary specialization make them especially vulnerable to environmental change. These results highlight the pressing need for dynamic, climate-adaptive conservation plans incorporating habitat corridors, bamboo restoration, and integrated reserve design. This paper emphasizes that protecting the giant panda calls for a systems-level approach combining climate modeling, ecological forecasting, and proactive conservation policy.

Keywords: Climate change, giant panda, temperature, distribution.

1. Introduction

Originally from China, the Ailuropoda melanoleuca, more commonly referred to as the giant panda, is a species that is in danger of extinction. It is listed on the sheet of China’s national conservation animals and attracts huge attention, research interests, and conservation advocacy here and abroad. The living habitats of giant pandas have been reducing for a long time due to complicated factors related to climate change. Historically, the species' range included most of southeastern China, the north of Myanmar, and Vietnam. In the late Pleistocene and following millennia, climate change and human activities, such as settlement and agriculture, drastically reduced the total area of giant panda habitats and altered their distribution. The population of giant pandas has currently fallen to a dangerous level, primarily located in the mountain ranges between the Sichuan Plain and the Tibetan Plateau [1]. Therefore, the loss of its habitat is one of the most serious hazards facing the giant panda. Giant pandas feed on bamboo, which ideally grows under the montane deciduous and coniferous forests. During the last few decades, these specific types of forests have been under destruction, becoming highly fragmented and fragile. Many giant pandas died due to the shortage of food, and their populations also became more isolated, leading to a higher risk of inbreeding [2]. There is not

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much that is novel and of interest in recent international research on the effects of climate change on giant pandas. Climate change reduced the area of habitats and increased the level of fragmentation, leading to a decline in the persistence of habitats. The increasing air temperature (0.3°C/decade in Sichuan since 1960) sped up the growth of bamboo and shortened the time of the flowering cycle, which led to the serious regional death of bamboo, directly reducing the food source of the giant panda[3]. In addition, a local research team investigated climate change in smaller areas, such as specific ranges of specific mountain ranges, claiming that human activities and climate change have an overlapping effect on the species and proposing some precise conservative strategies, including supporting the construction of national panda parks and increasing the disturbance of bamboos to improve the food source of giant pandas [4]. This study was motivated by the need to understand how climate change simultaneously affects the three ecological factors that determine giant panda survival: bamboo availability, habitat suitability, and community biodiversity. As an umbrella species, the panda's conservation is tightly connected with the health of entire mountain-forest ecosystems in the Asia-Pacific region. However, current research often treats these factors in isolation. There remain substantial knowledge gaps in how bamboo distribution models translate into food security, how elevation-driven habitat shifts fragment panda populations, and how sympatric species dynamics influence ecological stability under warming scenarios. In addition, mismatches between national-scale conservation strategies and localized ecological realities hinder policy implementation. Therefore, a more integrated and climate-responsive approach is urgently needed to guide adaptive panda conservation in the face of accelerating environmental change.

2. Climate-driven alterations to giant panda ecosystems

2.1. Climate-driven shifts in bamboo distribution

Through the utilization of Species Distribution Models (SDMs), a study was conducted to investigate the distribution of this species in the Qingling Mountains of China during the years 2050 and 2070. The study aimed to forecast the probable distribution of Bashan fir under a variety of different geographical conditions [1]. The models incorporated 12 environmental variables encompassing bioclimatic indicators influenced by temperature and precipitation. An examination of the response curves for the most important variables, including isotherms (Bio3), the minimum temperature during the coldest month (Bio6), precipitation during the wettest month (Bio13), and the seasonality of precipitation (Bio15 respectively)—utilizing a generalized additive model (GAM) revealed that these factors collectively explained over 85% of the variation in bamboo distribution. The key factors influencing their likely distribution were analyzed by comparing them in different scenarios.

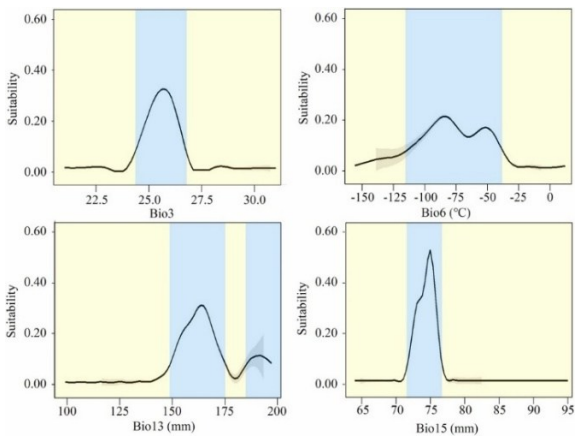

Figure 1: Key climate variable response curves for bamboo forest distribution forecasting [5]

DOI: 10.54254/2753-8818/2025.AU24104

The range of isotherms that are suitable for bamboo forests (Bio 3) was found to be between 24.36 and 26.78, as evidenced by the response curves of the four primary bioclimatic parameters to the occurrence probability of *B. fargesii*, the minimum temperatures during the coldest months (Bio 6) ranged from -114.80 to -37.80, and the precipitation during the wettest months (Bio 13) varied from 148.80 to 175.20 and from 185.10 to 197.00, while precipitation seasonality (Bio 15) ranged from 71.50 to 76.63 (e.g. Figure 1). Consequently, these four bioclimatic factors comprised over 85% of the total 12 factors, indicating that bioclimatic factors had greater influence than soil and topographic factors in determining the distribution of *B. fargesii*.

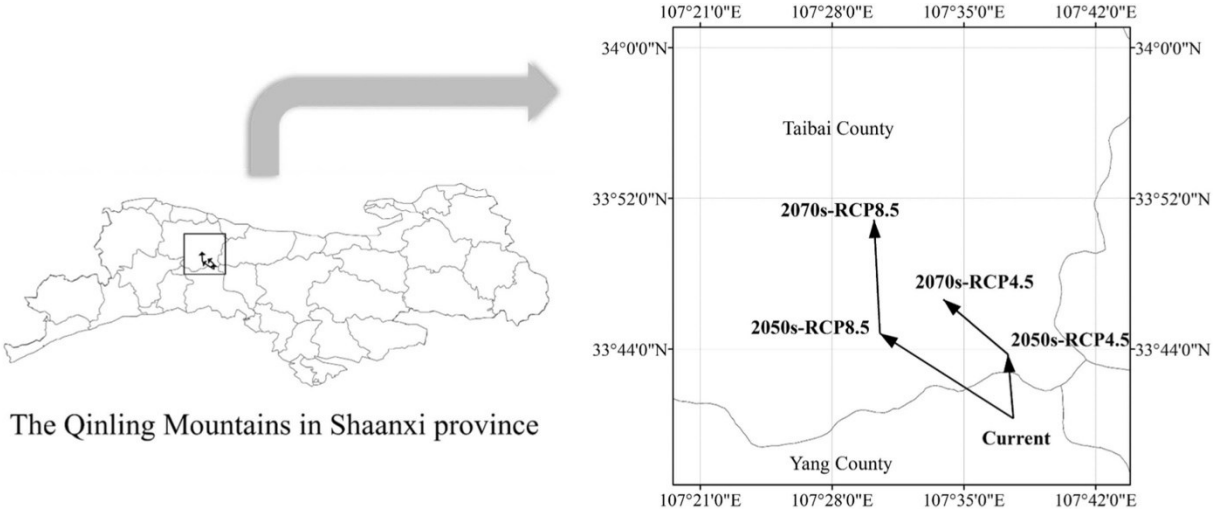

Figure 2: This is the optimal habitat of Abies fabri and its movement position with climate change [5]

A number of climate databases and satellite observations provide information regarding the distribution of bamboos, specifically Bashan bamboo, which is the principal source of nutrition for giant pandas. There are additional data sets of rain and temperature that are accessible for the Qinling area. According to the RCP4.5 scenario, it is expected that the optimal habitat center of *B. fargesii* will move 6.73 kilometers eastward to Taibai in the 2050s (Figure 2). It will continue to travel 7.23 kilometers towards Taibei by the time the 2070s roll around. By the 2050s, it is expected that the ideal habitat center of *B. fargesii* will have relocated to Taibai, which is located 14.22 kilometers to the northwest, according to the RCP8.5 model. After that, in the 2070s, it will move 11.15 kilometers to the north while heading in the direction of Taibai[5]. Therefore, climate change causes the optimal habitat for bamboo to shift northward and eastward, affecting the giant pandas' capacity to find food. In conclusion, the seasonality of precipitation was an essential ecological element determining the spread of *B. fargesii*, commonly referred to as bamboo, which serves as the principal source of nutrition for pandas. Furthermore, the appropriate habitats for *B. fargesii* are expected to disappear due to the extreme conditions of future climate change. The depletion of bamboo compromises the food security and survival of giant pandas, thereby threatening their ecological status. The strong correlation between panda populations and bamboo availability highlights the urgent necessity for climate-adaptive conservation strategies, encompassing habitat restoration, ecological corridor establishment, and potential management of bamboo species in response to shifting climate conditions.

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2.2. Climate change affects habitat distribution

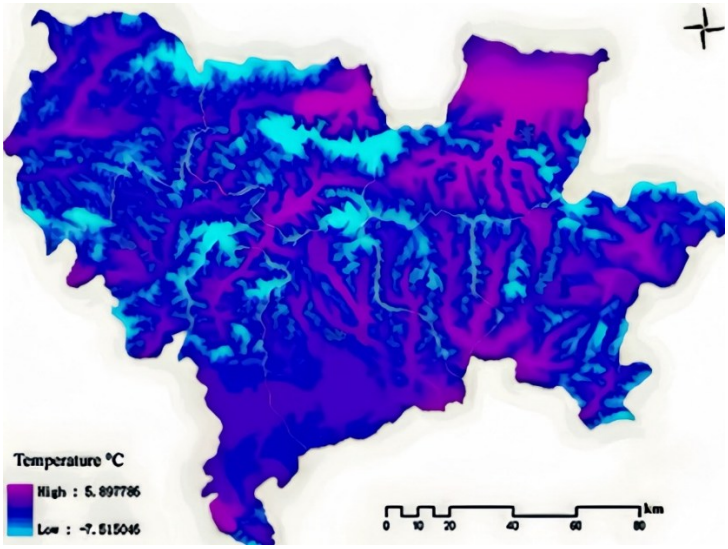

Figure 3: The annual average temperature in the Qinling Mountains varies depending on location [6]

The mean temperature fluctuates annually from -7.5°C to 5.9°C due to the alteration in latitude (Figure 3). From 1990 to 2007, the annual average temperature fluctuated between 7.9 °C and 14.5 °C. Annual precipitation varied between 615mm and 904mm. According to the statistics, the temperature that is expected to be experienced throughout the time span from 2070 to 2100 would be 2-2.7 degrees Celsius greater than the temperature that was seen during the early period of the IPCC SRES A2 predictions.

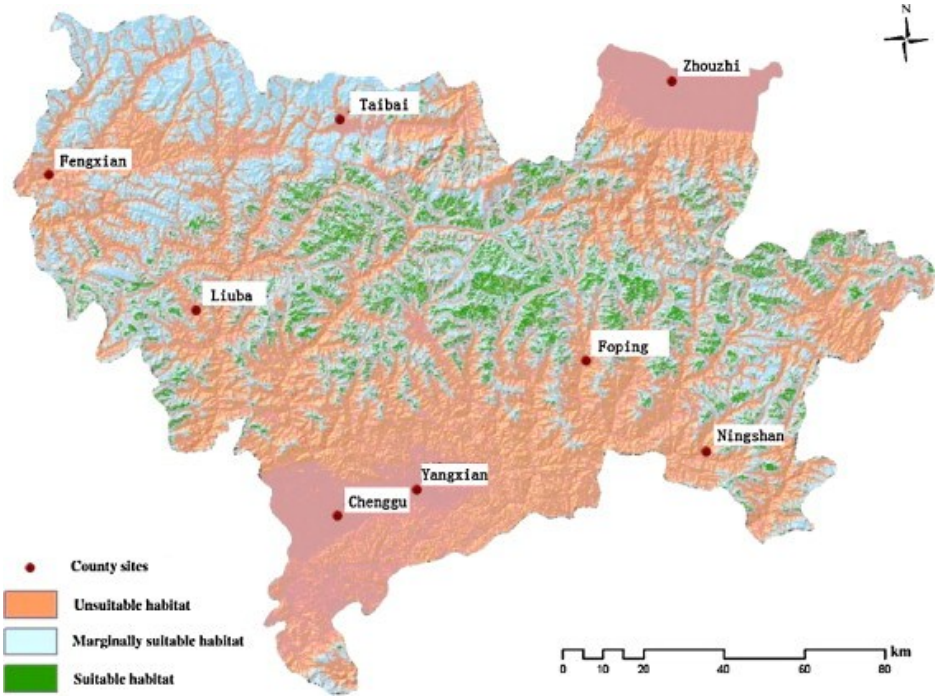

Figure 4: Giant pandas in areas with a suitable climate from 1990 to 2007 [7]

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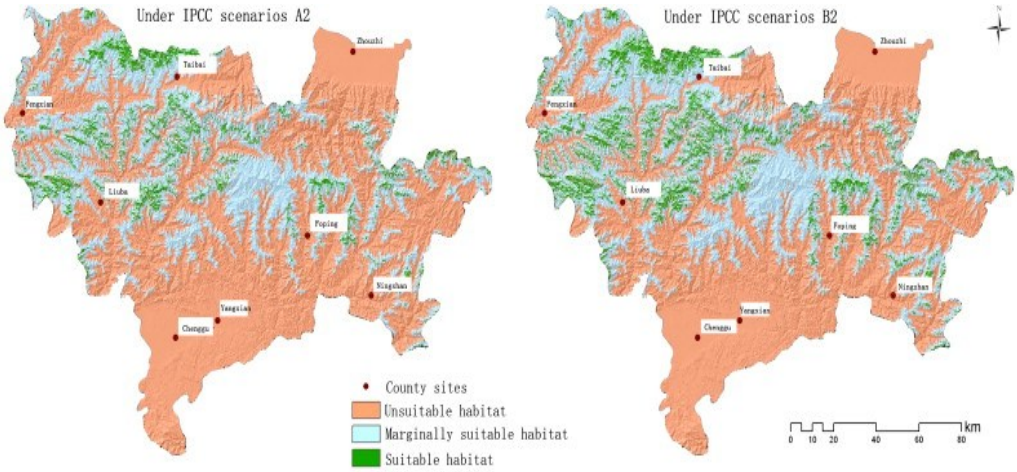

Figure 5: Changes in the living areas of giant pandas in different climate changes and finding suitable populations for demand areas [7]

A forward-looking scenario was used to simulate spatial change and loss of climatically suitable habitat for giant pandas in the Qinling Mountains using a mechanistic climate habitat model. The model emphasized elevational movement and total habitat loss, and assessed suitable and barely suitable habitat areas under historical (1990-2007) and projected future (2070-2100) climates. Between 1990 and 2007, the giant panda had approximately 1,359.6 square kilometers of climatically suitable habitat and approximately 6,998.5 square kilometers of marginally suitable habitat (Figure 4). It is expected that the climatically acceptable habitat for giant pandas in our research region would decline by 1,444.8 square kilometers between the years 2071 and 2100, as according to the SRES A2 model of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Figure 5). The result is that the climate change scenario predicts that the climate of the region in the future, which spans the years 2070 to 2100, would be much warmer and more humid than the climate that exists today, which spans the years 1990 to 2007. It is possible that the habitat that is suited for giant pandas may decrease by 62% as a result of climate change. According to the findings of research, the minimum altitude of the range for giant pandas is expected to increase by 500 meters. There is a possibility that regions to the north of their current range hold a new habitat that is suited for giant pandas. As a result, populations may become more dispersed and isolated, which would increase the likelihood of inbreeding, genetic bottlenecks, and reduced reproductive success. In addition, the development of new suitable habitats further north poses a conservation issue: giant pandas are slow migrants and may not be able to reach these sites in time without human-assisted relocation or corridor construction. Climate change is therefore not only a spatial issue for the survival of the giant panda, but also a threat to its long-term genetic viability and ecological stability.

2.3. Climate change affects the variety of the giant panda and its coexisting species of mammals

Through the MaxEnt models, a study was conducted that anticipated changes in the richness of giant pandas as well as 22 other species of sympatric mammals under a variety of forecasts for future climate change. A further prediction made by the study was that the coming climate change would result in a net loss of mammalian species. According to RCP 2.6, it was expected that 18 different species would experience a reduction in their range, while five of them were anticipated to see an extension of their range by the 2050s (Figure 6). Furthermore, similar patterns were seen under the RCP8.5 situation, albeit with less severe shifts in the habitat that is appropriate for human habitation. The study identified the Chinese Red Panda (Ailurus fulgens), Gray Wolf (Canis lupus), and Sichuan

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Snub-nosed Monkey (Rhinopithecus roxellana) as the three species most susceptible to climate change, projected to experience a minimum habitat loss of 27.283% across all future scenarios. Unlike more mobile or generalist species, pandas are slow breeders and poor dispersers, which limits their ability to adjust to fast-changing environments, and the severe impact is unpredictable.

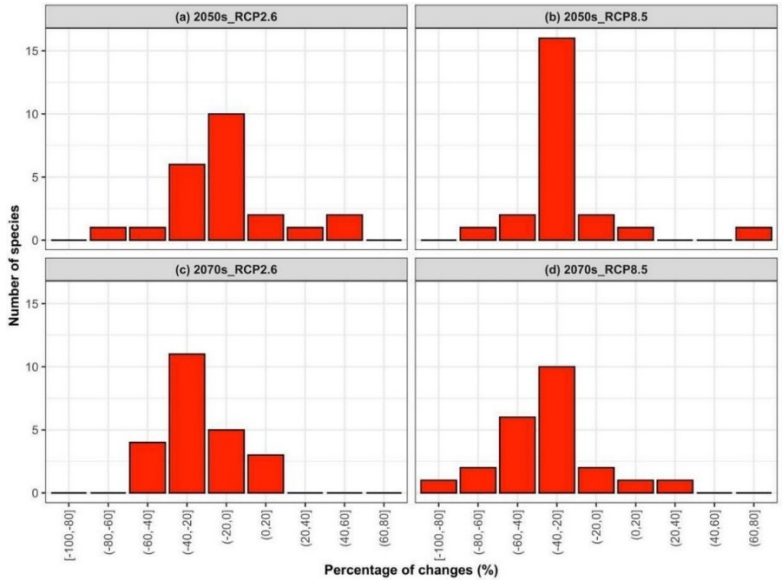

Figure 6: The changes in 23 mammal species' suitable habitats under four different future scenarios [4]

3. Conservation and strategy

The giant panda lives in a system of 67 protected natural reserves. Over nearly fifteen years, China has implemented the Natural Forest Conservation Program, which includes the Grain-to-Green program, with the goal of safeguarding all of the remaining forests and restoring those that have been destroyed within pandas' habitats [8]. Throughout the giant panda's habitat, the non-forest area has greatly shrunk while the forest area has grown [9]. Its future is still threatened, though, by habitat loss and fragmentation. The results of this paper suggest that climate change will exacerbate habitat loss and fragmentation for giant pandas. Because the habitats of the giant panda are becoming less available, it is necessary to engage in strategic forestry planning and to either protect bamboo in areas of panda reserves that are climatically suitable or to introduce bamboo into those areas. Establishing a canopy cover can be accomplished through the use of early succession pioneer species in the process of reforesting ecosystems [10]. It is possible to introduce into woodlands species that are unable to sustain open cultivation but that represent a varied range of life styles and phases in succession. This can be done after the canopy has been closed.

4. Conclusion

A flagship species for conservation initiatives both in China and worldwide. Due to the effects of climate change, the existence of the giant panda, also referred to as Ailuropoda melanoleuca, is under a significant and growing amount of danger. This study demonstrates that climate change is having far-reaching and complex effects on the basic ecological needs of giant pandas, particularly bamboo availability and habitat continuity. Rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns are not only projected to reduce the geographic extent of bamboo forests, but are also expected to shift desirable habitat to higher elevations and more northern areas that may be inaccessible to panda populations without human intervention. Such changes will probably aggravate current problems like food

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shortages, habitat fragmentation, and genetic isolation, therefore raising the danger of inbreeding and lowering the long-term viability and reproductive success of the species. Apart from direct environmental stressors, the comparison study with sympatric mammalian species shows that although the giant panda might not suffer the most severe proportion of habitat loss, its ecological rigidity makes it particularly susceptible. Unlike more mobile or generalist species, the panda's extremely specialized diet, low reproductive rate, and limited dispersal capacity significantly limit its capacity to react to fast environmental change. This difference emphasizes the need to consider species-specific biological and ecological constraints in addition to just measuring habitat loss in quantitative terms. Recent years have seen encouraging results from the Chinese government's continuous conservation initiatives, including the creation of National Giant Panda Parks, ecological restoration projects, and forest protection policies. The results, therefore, imply that although useful, these policies will have to be greatly improved and changed to fit the difficulties future climate scenarios present. Conservation has to change from a static, reserve-based approach to a more dynamic, landscape-level one, including climate projections, habitat connectivity, and species migration potential. Ensuring the panda's survival in a warming world depends on creating ecological corridors, restoring damaged forests, and aggressively controlling bamboo availability in climatically appropriate areas. In the end, the situation of the giant panda emphasizes a more general reality in conservation biology: species preservation in the Anthropocene calls for combining climate science, landscape planning, and adaptive ecological management. Saving the panda is not only about preserving an iconic species; it is also about preserving the integrity of an entire ecosystem on which many other species rely. The success of climate-adaptive conservation plans for the panda might act as a guide for handling comparable issues across worldwide biodiversity hotspots.

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