

# CHINA



Ranger Lan Yanchao checks a dead tree during a patrol on Liupan Mountain in Ningxia Hui autonomous region on Jan 9.  
PHOTOS BY JIA HAOCHENG / XINHUA

## Rangers on patrol protect Mount Liupan from fires

Teams manage simple lives while manning 76 forestry stations in Ningxia region

YINCHUAN — After a snowfall cast a white blanket on Liupan Mountain, Yan Xiaoyuan — in bright orange and with a shovel in his hand, a water tank on his back and a pair of binoculars around his neck — began his daily patrol.

It was his 25th Lunar New Year on Liupan. A difference in altitude of about 2,500 meters between Yan's workplace and home has left him no other choice but to join the family reunion via video call.

"We must be more alert, especially during Spring Festival, to make sure the forests are safe and sound," said Yan, 46. His parents used to work in local forest protection departments and thus understand his absence.

Liupan Mountain, crossing the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, is known as a green island on a plateau and a natural water tower, and it is rich in plant and animal resources.

Therefore, firefighting is extremely important on the mountain on dry winter days. There are more than 240 rangers in the Liupan forestry bureau of the city of Guyuan. They have been guarding the mountain year-round since 1958 and are on duty around the clock at 76 forestry stations.

With houses renovated and solar panels, TVs and Wi-Fi installed in recent years, living conditions in the stations, including Yan's Madiwan station, have been greatly improved. But food and water still need to be supplied from time to time.

Hui Jitang, 42, has been delivering supplies to Madiwan about once a week for six years. He needs to drive about 40 kilometers, more than half of which is unpaved, pos-



Four rangers from Madiwan station on Liupan Mountain take a break near a watch tower during a patrol.

### 240 rangers

have been guarding Liupan Mountain year-round.

ing great challenges when it snows or rains.

"It's very dangerous to drive along the slippery road. If you are trapped midway, a mobile phone without any signal will leave you helpless," Hui said. "But I have always managed to meet their needs, even during festivals and holidays."

Yan and his three colleagues are responsible for an area of about 4,000 hectares. They depart at 8 am and end work at 5 pm, patrolling 20 km or so over areas where humans tread, such as entrances to the mountain, to detect fire haz-

ards. They also need to protect wild animals from poachers and observe the forest situation from the tower every three hours.

"Life here is simple but also a little bit dull, so we tell jokes or sing folk songs to keep things fresh," said Ma Hongming, who has been a forest ranger for just three months.

Every time Ma comes across rare wildlife, such as leopards or golden pheasants, he is filled with excitement.

"I've seen wild boars several times. But I'm not very scared, because they only hurt people when they feel threatened," Ma said.

Binoculars, a shovel and water tank are the necessary tools when rangers patrol on the mountain. But now each of them is equipped with a hand-held terminal that can

report fires, capture photos of rare wild animals or call for help.

"It's easy and helpful, and all we need to do is press the button," Yan said.

Such technologies have been widely applied in forest firefighting in recent years. The Liupan forestry bureau also installed a real-time monitoring system to monitor indicators including the number of cars and people on the mountain, wind direction and temperature to ensure forest safety.

"Thanks to the rangers and technological means, the seven-month fire-prone season seems to be less difficult to overcome. But we still need to improve our emergency capacity," said Jing Wenke, deputy director of the bureau's firefighting center.

Jing said amateur and professional firefighting teams have been set up to improve emergency command. Apart from patrol work, the firefighters also take part in frequent training.

As returning migrant workers increase every year during Spring Festival, posing higher risks, Yan and his colleagues have become even busier these days.

"Nearby villagers are used to burning paper money as a tribute to the deceased during Spring Festival, so we have to persuade them to burn it in a bucket and wait until the flames go out," Yan said.

Because of his job, Yan spends much more time with his colleagues than his own family. "We treat each other like family, so we don't feel that lonely during a festival for family reunions," Yan said.

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## Village renovations keep beasts at bay

GUIYANG — Villager Wang Laochang and his family now safely occupy the house they renovated after sharing the two-story building with livestock for decades.

Wang, 49, lives in a poverty-stricken village in the hinterland of Guizhou province where families are used to sharing their houses with livestock. He said cohabitation is a tradition of the Miao ethnic people in order to prevent their animals from being stolen.

Wang was one of the first villagers to join a government-sponsored project to renovate homes to accommodate both beasts and humans. He

said the family's home is much cleaner and healthier since the renovation was completed.

"The animals used to live on the ground floor in a two-story house, or a one-story building that separated the family and the livestock with a wood partition," he said.

However, the animal feces posed health risks to villagers and made the houses and streets in the village unsanitary, especially during rainy days, Wang said.

Since July, local governments across Guizhou have provided financial support to help villagers renovate their houses and

improve village infrastructure.

"Villagers are also encouraged to join in the renovations by the offer of rewards, and it's an efficient way to save costs," said Wu Yibiao, an official with the local government of Rongjiang county, where Wang lives.

Wang Jinfu, 69, from a village not far from that of Wang Laochang, moved into his new house in October after receiving 15,000 yuan (\$2,164) from the local government when his home was included in the county's poverty-stricken household list.

Wang Jinfu and his wife now live

separately from the livestock, and she has made a New Year's resolution to raise several pigs to earn extra money.

Besides renovating houses, local governments also helped villagers with their pig farming by building separate hog pens.

According to statistics issued by Guizhou's Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the province has helped more than 70,000 households improve their living conditions, which has benefited around 280,000 people.

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## Army veteran makes sacrifice a second time

By LI HONGYANG in Beijing and LIU KUN in Wuhan

A military veteran who helped battle the 1998 Yangtze floods in Hubei is again making sacrifices to put safety in the province first.

As a railway signalman, Jiang Decheng has remained at his post for a month in Wuhan, the city at the epicenter of the novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreak.

Jiang, 51, works for the Wuhan Railway Administration and is responsible for maintaining and repairing a section of the railway-signaling system.

Keeping the signals operating properly is crucial to the smooth running and safety of the network, which has cut all but essential train services providing supplies. Intercity trains also pass through Wuhan without stopping.

The signalmen's work stations are scattered along Wuhan's rail network, with the majority in the suburbs. Jiang offered to return to work during the Spring Festival holiday just as the number of cases and deaths started to rise. Every day from 9:30 am to 10:20 pm, he routinely inspects and tests the signal equipment to ensure that supply trains arrive at Wuhan's Hankou Station on time.

"When trains carrying passengers and anti-epidemic relief supplies arrived in Hankou Station, it felt like the most secure moment to me," he said.

Due to the citywide lockdown and traffic control measures imposed by authorities, Jiang has to sleep at his workplace, and spent the Spring Festival holiday alone.

"My workplace is near a village and I heard a lot of people there had been infected," he said. "But I can't shrink from my duties because of fear at this critical point. It's not in my character, anyway."

When his 85-year-old mother learned he was working during the outbreak, she didn't sleep for two nights.

"She calls me every day," Jiang said. "One day, she called me con-



Jiang Decheng works at the control room of his station in Wuhan. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

stantly at 6 am and 10 am. She watches the news on TV every day and worries about me."

Jiang said his wife supported his decision and told him: "You are a Party member and you should be a role model and step in front of others to tackle difficulties. I can help with our family."

He said she would always reassure him on the phone that everything was all right at home.

"But later I learned from my daughter that there was no meat at home, just an onion, two carrots and one cabbage left," he said.

"They didn't have masks and did not dare to go outside for food. I was far from home, so I asked a colleague living in my neighborhood to send some to them."

Jiang has faced life-threatening emergencies before, when he was in the military. During the 1998 Yangtze flood disaster, which claimed thousands of lives, Jiang worked for three days and nights carrying sandbags on a river embankment in Jingzhou, Hubei.

The arduous task left him with serious spinal injuries and he can no longer straighten up from the waist. Jiang said he didn't know when the virus would be brought under control, but he would stay at his post till the end. He believes that with the support of people across the country, Wuhan will win the war against the virus.

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## 'White angels' save a sick traveler

HOHHOT — After wearing a mask for so long, Ge Lei took several deep breaths when she stepped out of the hospital, inhaling fresh air free from the smell of disinfectant for the first time in weeks.

A white-collar worker from Wuhan, Hubei province, 26-year-old Ge (not her real name) had been excited about her Lunar New Year tour to Russia. For weeks she had been dreaming of an ice dive on Lake Baikal in Siberia and viewing the northern lights in Murmansk.

However, her trip was cut short at the border city of Erenhot in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region last month when she was diagnosed with novel coronavirus pneumonia.

After two weeks of being quarantined and treated in hospital, she was discharged on Feb 6. "I will never forget those 14 days," she said.

Early on Jan 23, Ge had been on a train traveling from Beijing to Moscow, when it arrived at Erenhot station. She and five other passengers were stopped by officials during a routine customs check.

"My passport showed I was from Wuhan, the epicenter of the virus outbreak, so I was told a further check was required," she said. Ge was unaware she had a fever and recorded a slightly high body temperature of 37.3 C.

When the suspected infected people were taken to Erenhot People's Hospital, medical staff in protective suits were waiting at the gate. "I'd never seen such a scene before, all my nerves were strained," Ge said. After a series of examinations, including a blood test and computed tomography scans, Ge was suspected to have contracted the virus.

Later on the same day, China locked down the entire city of Wuhan in an unprecedented move to curb the spread of the virus, as the number of the confirmed cases across the country had surpassed 500.

Ge tested positive for the virus a

day later, on the eve of the Lunar New Year. On hearing the result, she burst out crying in the hospital, her body trembling. "I had no family around me. I thought I would die," she recalled. After the medical staff calmed her down, Ge was finally able to call her mother and tell her about her infection.

Her anxiety and fear contributed to her condition deteriorating, and she developed pneumonia.

Liu Haisheng, director of the hospital's infectious diseases department, said Ge's pneumonia worsened, and two days later her condition was classified as "severe".

Ge was provided with nutritious food including fruit, milk and milk tofu, a local specialty and one of her personal favorites.

She said the most impressive meal was the dumplings on the eve of the Lunar New Year. "On top of the dumpling box, I saw a card saying 'Happy New Year. Be strong!'" For the first time in my life, I was warmed by strangers, just like family," she said. Whenever medical staff checked on her, Ge rarely spoke. "I didn't want to utter a word for fear of contaminating them — the 'white angels,'" she said.

On Jan 25, following a group consultation of senior doctors at the hospital, a decision was made to give her the HIV medication Kaletra. The antiretroviral medication was delivered from the regional capital Hohhot, and given to the doctors on the evening of Jan 27.

The drug, in combination with some traditional Chinese medicine, worked well on Ge. Her symptoms were gone by Feb 1, and she was tested for the virus again. She was discharged on Feb 6 after a second test confirmed the negative result.

Six people who were in close contact with her were also released after a 14-day quarantine. Ge is still under medical observation in Erenhot.

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