

Tamer takes care of rare-monkey business

By JIA TINGTING
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Xiao Zhijin's routine has been unchanged for decades. At 8 am he treks several kilometers to a river valley, bringing breakfast to his friends of 26 years. No words are spoken, but the communication is excellent.

Those waiting for breakfast are Francois' langurs, one of the world's rarest monkeys. Named after Auguste Francois (1857-1935), a French diplomat based in southern China, the monkeys have a distinctive look with black, silky hair and distinctive white sideburns that grow from their ears to the cheeks.

Xiao, 52, first came into contact with the monkeys as a forest ranger in 1987, but it was another 10 years before he actually took charge of monitoring and taming them at the Mayanghe Nature Reserve in the Yanhe Tujia autonomous prefecture of Guizhou province.

On arrival at the spot on the Mayanghe River, Xiao gave a three-whistle signal, and 10 langurs rushed to meet him as he handed out potato chips.

"There should be 11," Xiao said, unable to hide his concern. "Maybe the missing one is dead."

While Xiao has a special relationship with the langurs, nearby villagers once had a different outlook and regarded them as pests.

"No one could get close to them, the little robbers, except him," one villager said with a smile, referring to Xiao.

Fed up with the monkeys stealing corn and grain, locals nicknamed them "Yanzhu monkeys", which literally means "greedy pigs" inhabiting rocks and caves.

The villagers didn't realize the importance of the langurs until the Mayanghe Nature Reserve was upgraded to a national reserve in 2003.

It is estimated that there



Xiao Zhijin feeds Francois' langurs in a nature reserve in Guiyang, Guizhou province, in September.

are about 2,000 langurs in the world, mostly in southern China and northern Vietnam.

There were 730 langurs, formed into 76 groups, in the Mayanghe nature reserve in 2004, according to the environmental group Fauna and Flora International.

The local government initially appointed four workers to feed the langurs, but now only Xiao remains as the sole langur tamer in China.

He started the feeding routine with a group of five langurs dwelling in a cave. For two months he camped at the cave entrance, about 30 meters from the langurs' dwelling, observing their behavior and recording the physical characteristics and food habits of each member of the group.

Xiao put corn, peanuts, and sweet potato chips at the same spot each day at the exact same time.

He formally "introduced" himself to them on Chinese New Year's Day 1998, when he stayed near the food in full sight.

"I was surprised and comforted that they didn't run away when they saw me," he said.

Xiao then spent another month summoning the langurs by whistles.

During the past two decades, Xiao has grown into an expert on their rituals and behavior.

Based on his observations, the number of langurs in the reserve is about 800 as their reproductive cycle is slow and the groups follow a hierarchical system. Only the leader of each group has the right to mate and breed, and intermarriage is forbidden.

Besides, the langurs, whose average lifespan is about 26 years (roughly the amount of time Xiao has been in contact with them), can only give birth to one offspring at a time, and the interval between births is about three years.

Animal behaviorist Hu Gang, whose specialty is langurs, said Xiao's work provided him with a valuable insight when he came to the reserve in 2003.

Hu classified the langurs

into four age groups: The infants — less than 6 months old; "teenagers" — around 2 years old; "youths" — from 4 to 5 years old; and the "adults" — more than 6 years old.

"The langurs attach great importance to family values," Xiao said, but they have a violent streak and whenever a leader is overthrown, as frequently happens, their offspring are often killed to ensure supremacy.

One group leader was overthrown by a younger rival with whom Xiao had established a good relationship. In time, that leader was overthrown and Xiao knows his newborns were killed.

Xiao's devotion to the reserve has not brought him financial rewards.

"We have just scraped by for the past two decades," Xiao's wife said.

But for Xiao, it has been rewarding because he is not taming the langurs for himself but for the world.

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Toughest part of major bridge done

By XU JINGXI
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Construction of the landmark Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge is progressing smoothly, and the most technically difficult part has been completed, according to the executive director of the project's administration on the mainland.

The bridge, the most challenging engineering project of its type in the world today, will link the southern economic hub of Guangdong province to Hong Kong and Macao. One-third of the undersea tube tunnel has been laid, executive director Wei Dongqing said.

"Technically, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge is a world-class project," he said.

"The bridge's 6.7-kilometer undersea tunnel is the longest and the most challenging of its kind in the world. The entire world is paying attention to our project to see if we can pull it off," he said.

Engineers from Europe and the Middle East, where similar tunnels and bridges are planned, are visiting the project to glean as much information as they can.

"The project has brought together China's best bridge designers, engineers and managers. The bridge is a showcase of national expertise."

The 55-km Y-shaped bridge starts on Lantau Island, where Hong Kong International Airport is located.

To ensure aviation safety and not to disrupt the busy Lingdingyang waterway, about 6.7 km of the roadway has to go underwater.

The tunnel is made up of 33



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WEI DONGQING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE HONG KONG-ZHUHAI-MACAO BRIDGE PROJECT'S ADMINISTRATION ON THE MAINLAND

tubes that are immersed into the water and joined.

The 13th tube — 180 meters long and weighing 80,000 metric tons — was sunk 45 meters deep at the lowest point of the tunnel on Sept 20.

"I think it is even more difficult than Tiangong-1's space docking with Shenzhou-10 to accurately put the 33 'aircraft carriers' in a straight line underwater, considering wave disturbance and currents that are difficult to predict," he said.

Another challenge, albeit of a different type, was to coordinate different engineering standards, legal systems and border inspection regulations of the mainland and the two special administrative regions, Wei said.

"The bridge is a tangible link of the east and west banks of the Pearl River while it is also an intangible link connecting different systems and cultures of the mainland and the two SARs," he said.

"I believe we can solve any difference because we have the same goal of facilitating communication. Whatever the standards are, we will adopt them if they are better and higher."

Design requirements vary. The design life of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge is 120 years, according to Hong Kong specifications, while specifications for a bridge on the mainland is usually 70 to 100 years, said Zhao Chuanlin, project manager of an 8.67 km section of the bridge.

"The success of building the bridge will be a leap for China from a major country in the field of bridge construction to a global bridge engineering power," Zhao said.

Changing landscape

The project, with a total investment of 105 billion yuan (\$17.1 billion), will slash by half the three-hour car journey from Hong Kong to Zhuhai on the west bank of the Pearl River, now made by way of Shenzhen and Dongguan.

"The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge will change the economic landscape of the Pearl River estuary and boost growth on the less-developed west bank of Pearl River," said Wei.

"Zhuhai will become a traffic hub and the core city on the river's west bank," he said.

"The bridge will also open up a passage for Hong Kong to tap into the markets in western Guangdong, the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and western China provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan."

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Chengdu on track to become an international hub

By LI YU and PENG CHAO
in Chengdu

Chengdu, an inland city in southwest China known for its giant pandas and tasty cuisine, is striving to become a globally appealing city and China's western gateway for opening-up.

The city's ambition is backed by China's national strategy to develop western China and build the Silk Road economic belt.

"The relocation of industrial infrastructure and redirection of investment to inland western regions has provided Chengdu with a historic opportunity to build itself into an international metropolis," said Huang Xin-chu, Party chief of Chengdu.

"The city government mapped out a comprehensive development strategy aimed at opening up to the outside world and integrating into the world economy, making the city a top destination in western China for global industries, capital and talent," Huang said.

Recognizing the city's growth potential, semiconductor giant Intel Corp set up a chip package and test factory in the city in 2003. Intel's success in Chengdu has added to the city's charm and helped make it a magnet for international companies.

Chengdu is home to 255 Fortune Global 500 companies, including Intel, Dell, Lenovo, DHL, UPS, FAW-Volkswagen and Volvo.

Half of the world's laptop chips are packaged and tested in the city and two-thirds of the iPads in the world are made in Chengdu.

Global logistics giant DHL established an operations center in Chengdu in 2012 and moved

its business focus within China to the western regions.

"Our company places high value on Chengdu as an emerging market and investment focus in China," said Zou Yin, general manager of DHL supply chain in China.

"DHL has added investment in Chengdu and southwestern China as the market continues to grow and more clients establish relationships with us," he said.

Wu Dongming, executive vice-president of DHL Express Asia Pacific, said the group planned to establish its global shared service center in the city.

In February, DHL signed an agreement with the Chengdu International Express Center to expand its business in the city. Plans include enlarging the company operations space to 2,000 square meters, which will be able to handle 8,000 tons of express cargo annually.

Logistics system

To boost communication with the outside world and draw more foreign investment Chengdu has put great importance on developing its logistics system.

"Transportation comes first. That's our strategy," Party chief Huang said. "We want to transform Chengdu from a domestic transportation hub into an international hub."

United Airlines started a direct Chengdu-San Francisco route on June 11, which marked the first direct link from western China to the United States.

British Airways increased the number of flights to Chengdu from three to five a week on May 6, less than eight months after it opened the direct route, which was also the first direct



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flight connecting western China to the United Kingdom.

Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport is the fourth busiest airport on the Chinese mainland. It operates 157 domestic and 74 international routes that connect the city to 108 domestic and 65 overseas destinations.

International routes to Moscow, Paris, Dubai and African cities are also planned, according to Chen Zhongwei, director of Chengdu Logistics Office.

The city expanded its overland connections with Europe with an express freight train that travels 9,826 kilometers to Lodz, in Poland.

The Chengdu-Europe express train, which opened in April 2013, runs along parts of the legendary Silk Road, where caravans shipped silk, jewelry and spices for sale between China and European countries 2,000 years ago.

The weekly train carries electronic products such as laptops



LIU LUNAN / CHINA DAILY

A comparison between the Chengdu-Europe express rail route, the maritime route and the traditional Sino-European rail route shows that the new rail link is the most efficient.

produced by PC giant Dell or iPads by Apple, as well as auto parts, home appliances and other daily necessities.

"It is the fastest and most frequently used direct freight train from China to Europe," Chen said.

It takes 14 days for the train cargo to get from Chengdu to Lodz. Then within three days, the shipments are delivered to customers in London, Paris, Berlin and Rome through the widespread European railway and road network.

"The express train is a month faster than ocean shipping and costs only a quarter of air cargo transportation," Chen said. He added that the running time could be shortened from 14 days to 12 days in the near future.

"It broke the tradition of an export-oriented economy relying on sea ports, turning Chengdu's inland geographical disadvantage into an advantage



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The Chengdu-Europe express train, which opened in April 2013, is the fastest freight rail link between China and Europe.

for exporting to Europe," he said.

The express train is expected to operate a return route service by the end of the year, to bring European products into China. Chengdu has been honored

with several visits from foreign leaders and dignitaries in recent years.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel chose Chengdu as the first stop of her visit to China in July. She brought a big trade

and economic delegation and learned how to cook *kung pao chicken*, a famous Sichuan dish, at a local restaurant.

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