



Like house cats, red pandas **groom themselves** by using their paws to wash their bodies.

**1 BUILT-IN BALANCE**  
Tightrope walking is all about **balance**. But red pandas can't exactly extend their arms like an acrobat! Instead they **hold their tails straight behind them**. "If they start to swing in one direction, they can move their tails the opposite way," Mariel says. "It's a bit like a tightrope walker's pole."

When red pandas need to **cool off**, they dangle their legs down the sides of branches.

A red panda's tail is almost as long as its body

# CRAZY NAMES

European scientists were confused when they first heard about red pandas in **1825**. "They couldn't figure out what they were," says Mariel. Experts now know that they're in a family all their own. But that didn't stop people from calling them by some odd names before settling on 'red panda.' Which name below do you think is the best?!



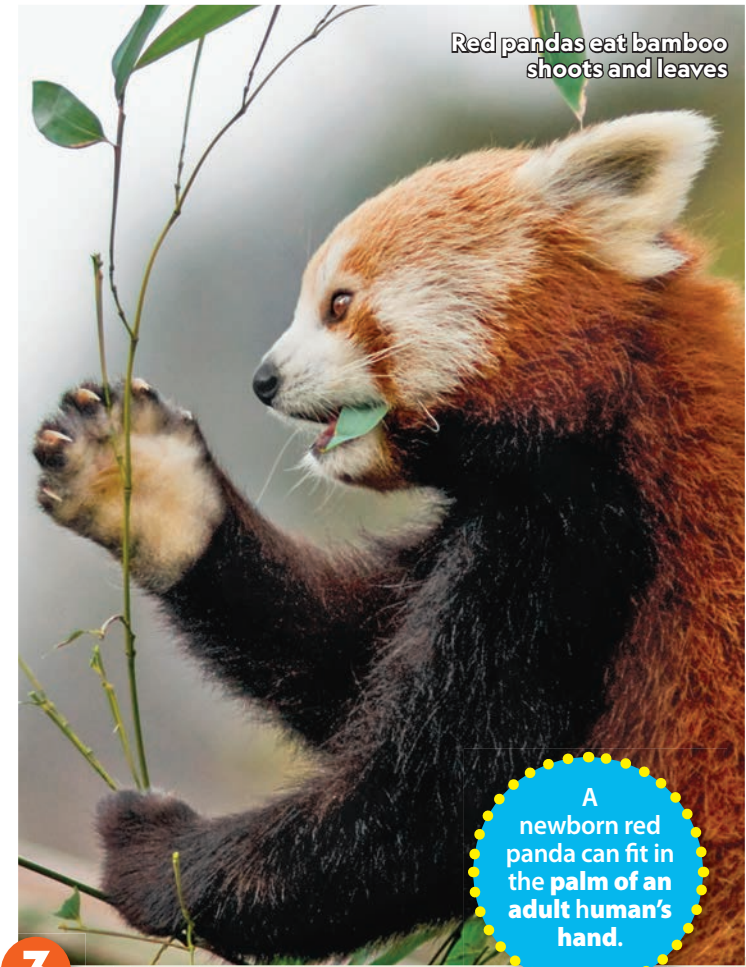
- ☐ Lesser Panda
- ☐ Red Bear-Cat
- ☐ Red Cat-Bear
- ☐ Firefox
- ☐ Firecat
- ☐ Fox-Bear



**2 ALL-AROUND ANKLES**  
About the only time red pandas **go to the ground** is to, erm, go to the loo! And they scamper down tree trunks headfirst. How? They **rotate their ankles 180 degrees** – that's like being able to turn your foot backwards! The move gives their **curved claws** a better angle to **hang on** to the bark.

I NEED A WEE!

PANDA SMACKDOWN					
	WHERE THEY LIVE	WHAT THEY DO	FOOD THEY LOVE	THUMBS-UP	STATUS
RED PANDAS		Spend most of their time eating and sleeping in trees	Tender shoots and leaves of bamboo plants	Thumb-like digits help them climb down trees headfirst	Endangered
BOTH	Forage in cool mountain forests in Asia, often within 100m of each other. (Many of the animals' similarities developed because of this shared habitat.)		Bamboo, bamboo and more bamboo	Thumb-like digits on their wrists	Threatened by habitat destruction
GIANT PANDAS		Spend more time plodding around on the ground looking for food	Tough bamboo stalks	Thumb-like digits help them grasp bamboo	Vulnerable



Red pandas eat bamboo shoots and leaves

**3 FLUFFY FEET**  
A red panda can't pull on wellies when it starts raining, and wet paws on a slippery branch can be dangerous. So the **soles of a red panda's feet** are completely covered in **fur**, helping it keep its footing in the rain. Compare that to your dog or cat's bare pads.

A newborn red panda can fit in the palm of an adult human's hand.



**4 UNDER FUR COVER**  
What's the best way to avoid a hungry **snow leopard**? Never let it see you in the first place! In the **fir trees** of the **Himalayan mountains**, the small red panda's **fiery fur** hides it hide in the **reddish moss** and **white lichen** (a plantlike organism) that often hangs on the trees. The animals are so hard to spot that even **scientists** have trouble locating these creatures!



Special wrist bones also help them grasp bamboo



**CLAW-SOME PAWS**  
Red pandas' paws are tipped with **supersharp claws**, which give them a **good grip** on branches. But what happens if they slip? "By digging their claws into the branch, the pandas can stop themselves from falling all the way down to the ground," says Mariel.

**5 FAKE THUMB**  
Trapeze artists need their thumbs to wrap their hands around the trapeze as they swing. Otherwise they might fly off! It's the same idea with red pandas. They have a special **thumb-like wrist bone** that gives them an extra grip when climbing down trees headfirst.

Crazy names: Cat ears © Nelk / Shutterstock; Bear head © Vishnevsky Vasily / Shutterstock; Giant panda body and fox tail © Eric Isselee / Shutterstock (Image Digitally Composed)

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