The giant panda’s weapon

Dear children,

Isn't this giant panda cute and cuddly? But have you looked at the colours of its fur carefully.

Why do you think there is so much black and white fur? Do you see the places where there is a lot of black fur...? Yes, on the ears, on its tummy, and on its legs. Where else?



Look closer...those big black eyes are actually black fur around smallish eyes. Can you think of a reason why the giant panda wants to make his eyes look so big and why it has so much black and white on its body?



The Honey Badger and I think that it is using its black and white colours as sign language to warn animals that it has a hidden weapon. Can you think of the types of animals that could attack a giant panda? One of them is stripy.



Good guess! Yes, a tiger. Another is spotty.



Yes, a leopard.



And the last one is a type of dog called a dhole, which hunts in packs.



In the past, all of these animals – tigers, leopards and dholes – would have been living in the same place as giant pandas; so there was a lot of danger facing them. Today, the giant pandas are only found in a few places compared with where they lived in the past, so they don’t face these dangers anymore.



Do you think the big white face with big black spots would be quite a scary thing for a tiger, leopard or dhole to come across? We think this clear black and white pattern is saying to these predators: "don't attack me, I am scary, because of my secret weapon of special teeth in the back of my mouth that no other bears have.







These teeth are very sharp and designed for biting chunks of flesh out of enemies like you. My very strong jaws make my bite extra scary”. Do you think the giant panda is still cuddly and cute? Now you perhaps see him as a bit fierce?

The giant pandas black and white patterns – similar to the ones you can see on a skunk – are the opposite of camouflage, which as you know is about trying to blend into the background. The patterns make the animal more conspicuous – that means easy to see.



So when you next drive along the road and see the black and white markings that humans have painted on the concrete curb next to the side of the road so that drivers can see clearly where the road ends, think about the giant panda. It also uses the strong contrast of black and white colours to warn of danger. Can you remember what danger…? Yes! The danger of specially designed, sharp teeth and a very strong bite. It's fun to think about why animals have coats with particular patterns, isn't it?



Kind regards from the Bio-edge,

Robin