



Where I work Wansheng Jiang

I study the Chinese giant salamander (*Andrias davidianus*), which is native to the Yangtze River Basin of central China. This particular species is critically endangered in the wild owing to habitat loss and overcatching. My research focuses on the salamander's conservation biology and evolutionary ecology.

In this photo, I am releasing a Chinese giant salamander at the Golden Whip River in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park on an early morning in September 2021. My team and I caught the salamander the night before, to measure its size and collect tissue samples for genetic analyses.

My interest in aquatic animals started as a child. I grew up in a rural village in Hunan province, and I remember spending most of my childhood playing and fishing near my home. Because of this, I knew where each fish species lived in nearby rivers and lakes, and it sparked my interest in river ecology.

I'm employed as an associate professor at Jishou University, where I lead a team dedicated to researching this species of salamander. Wild salamanders are quiet,

nocturnal animals that live in remote areas. This makes studying them challenging. My team tried many creative ways to track down the animals, including walking along riverbanks with torches and photographing salamanders under water – but these techniques didn't work as well as we needed them to. We eventually found that the best way to trap wild salamanders is to use small live fish and chicken livers as bait. The research is challenging, but we've learnt to be patient and celebrate every small success we have.

Studying Chinese giant salamanders has also taught me an important life lesson: adapt to thrive. When food is abundant, the salamanders grow rapidly; when food is scarce, they can go up to 11 months without feeding. In my personal life and work, I have experienced successes and failures, and taking on that lesson has been useful.

Wansheng Jiang is an associate professor at Jishou University. **Interview by Andy Tay.**

Photographed by
Wu Huiyuan/Sixth Tone.

Correction

This Where I work article erroneously pointed to Traditional Chinese Medicine as one of the main reasons for overcatchment of the Chinese giant salamander.