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**Press release**

## **A Double Panda Happiness at Zoo Berlin**

### **Offspring of the rarest bears in the world: twins born in the Panda Garden**

They are here! The eagerly awaited second offspring of female panda Meng Meng (11) was born on 22 August at 13:03 and 14:19 in Zoo Berlin's Panda Garden. Both cubs are doing well and are being lovingly cared for around the clock by their mum and the experienced panda team. Now it's time to keep your fingers crossed for the critical first few days.

After two heartbeats during an ultrasound examination on 11 August provided the first evidence of a successful pregnancy, the twins were born just 11 days later. The gestation period was 149 days. The now experienced mother knew what to do immediately after the birth. 'I am relieved that the two were born healthy. The little ones make a lively impression and mum Meng Meng takes great care of her offspring,' says a delighted vet and Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. 'With fewer than 2,000 adult giant pandas in their natural habitat, every single cub is an important contribution to the conservation of this endangered species. My heartfelt thanks therefore go to the entire team at the Panda Garden, whose excellent preparation and great commitment created the basis for this great moment.' Wildlife endocrinologist Dr Jella Wauters from the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research had already moved into her quarters at the zoo on 18 August - along with her mobile laboratory. She has also accompanied several panda births and therefore has some experience. With the help of her hormone analyses, which she carried out every four hours using urine samples, she was recently able to predict the time window for the birth very reliably. 'Once again, Mrs Wauters was right about the due date. Even I am always surprised at the high level of research into hormone analyses. Such reliable predictions are only possible with a very extensive knowledge of the hormone balance of giant pandas,' confirms Knieriem. The basis for the successful birth was laid by artificial insemination, which was carried out on 26 March by Prof. Dr Thomas Hildebrandt, Head of the Department of Reproduction Management at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) and his colleague Dr Susanne Holtze.

The cubs weigh 169g and 136g and are about 14cm long. Like other giant bears, giant pandas are born almost naked, deaf, blind and pink. The typical black and white panda markings only develop later. The sexes have not yet been determined with certainty. About half of all births in human care are twins. As giant pandas usually only raise one cub when they give birth to twins, Zoo Berlin has decided to actively support Meng Meng's rearing in close cooperation with the experts at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.



This means that the cubs are alternately with their mother every two to three hours to drink and are otherwise cared for by the panda team in a cosy, warm incubator.

'We are delighted to have two experienced colleagues from the Chengdu Panda Base at our side to look after the cubs. With around 20 births a year, they have much more experience and are better able to assess development,' explains biologist and panda curator Dr Florian Sicks, describing the new daily routine at Panda Garden: "Together with our team, they monitor the incubator, the babies' temperatures, they measure and weigh them - just like in a baby ward in a Berlin hospital. We actually received an incubator from there. We would like to thank DRK Klinken Westend for this generous donation. The device is now in use around the clock at Panda Garden and it is particularly practical for us that it can be operated in German and English as well as Chinese.

The young panda family will now spend the 'familiarisation period' in the rear area of the panda stable and will not be visible to zoo guests for the time being. Even in the wild, male pandas are not involved in rearing cubs. Panda dad Jiao Qing (14) can therefore still be seen eating bamboo and relaxing in the Panda Garden.

### **Background Giant Panda**

Without conservation measures, the giant panda would most likely already be extinct. The giant panda is a unique specialist with specific needs. Thanks to intensive measures against poaching and the promotion of protected areas and connecting corridors, populations have recovered somewhat, but the giant panda is classified as 'endangered' on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with just under 2,000 individuals in its natural habitat. The fragmentation of its habitat by roads, railway lines and agricultural land is a major problem for the solitary animal.

Zoo Berlin has been home to Germany's only giant pandas since summer 2017. On 31 August 2019, female panda Meng Meng gave birth to two baby pandas (Pit: 186 g and Paule: 136 g). They were the first panda offspring ever born in Germany. Pit and Paule left Zoo Berlin in December 2023 and have been living at the Chengdu Panda Base in China ever since. In March of this year, after intensive observation and careful preparation by the international team of experts, Meng Meng underwent artificial insemination. Female giant pandas are only able to reproduce for around 72 hours a year, and the fragmentation of their natural habitat makes it difficult for the animals to find each other at mating time.

### **Timetable Giant Panda Zoo Berlin**

- 5 July 2017 Opening of the Panda Garden at Zoo Berlin
- 31 August 2019 Birth of the first panda offspring in Germany - 'Pit and Paule'



- 16 December 2023 Return of Pit and Paule to Chengdu, China
- 26 March 2024 Artificial insemination of Meng Meng
- 11 August 2024 First ultrasound proof of pregnancy - two heartbeats