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Press Release

Panda Update from Zoo Berlin

Cuddling, drinking, cuddling: twins are doing well after the first five days

Zoo Berlin has been floating in a baby panda bubble for five days now. Day and night, the panda twins are lovingly cared for by their mother Meng Meng (11) and the experienced panda team at Zoo Berlin and the Chengdu Panda Base. Every hour, the two cubs take turns drinking and cuddling with their mum bear. Thanks to the nutritious mother's milk, the two cubs have already regained their birth weight and now even weigh a few grams more: the first-born cub currently weighs 180 g, the second-born 145 g. As is usual with many mammals, giant panda cubs initially lose weight in the first few days after birth. The increase causes cautious optimism among everyone involved, as the first few days are crucial. 'In the first month and especially in the first 14 days, cub mortality is at its highest and is around a quarter higher than in any other age group,' reports biologist and panda curator Dr Florian Sicks. 'Panda cubs are born without a functioning immune system and are therefore very vulnerable in the first few days. They can easily catch a cold as they are not yet able to maintain their body temperature on their own. The mother's milk provides them with important first defences and ensures that the young animals become stronger.' In the first 14 days, the young drink around eight to twelve times a day.

'Without protective measures, the giant panda would most likely already be extinct,' explains Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. 'As there are only fewer than 2,000 giant pandas left in their natural habitat, every cub that grows up healthy counts. In the natural habitat, a mother panda can only raise one cub, which means that one of the cubs dies in the event of a twin birth, which occurs in around 50 per cent of cases. However, we have the opportunity here to save this cub.' Zoo veterinarian Dr Franziska Sutter, who is also a trained paediatric nurse and has experience in the infant ward, adds: 'To ensure that both young animals grow up as naturally as possible, i.e. with mother's milk and maternal care, the twins alternate with Meng Meng. In the meantime, the other cub is in the incubator and sleeps. When it wakes up and wants to drink, it comes to Meng Meng. This ensures that both cubs form a bond with their mother and are supplied with the all-important mother's milk.'

The panda twins are still completely helpless and dependent on mum Meng Meng and their caretakers. Like other giant bears, giant pandas are born almost naked, deaf, blind and pink. The typical black and white panda markings only develop later. So it will be quite a while before they are big and strong enough to explore their surroundings. Until then, they will remain at the back of the panda enclosure, just like Meng Meng, and cannot be seen by zoo guests. However, panda dad Jiao Qing (14) can still be seen in the Panda Garden, as male giant pandas are not involved in rearing cubs in their natural habitat.

Giant panda background



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. 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. On 22 August 2024, twins were born again at Zoo Berlin at 13:03pm and 14:16pm.