



15.10.2024

**Press release**

## **First glance at panda cubs**

### **Guests can visit panda cubs at Zoo Berlin for the first time**

The panda cubs born at the end of August spent the first few weeks growing up behind the scenes at Zoo Berlin, and now visitors can take a look at the rabbit-sized panda cubs for the first time. From 16 October, the 2.5-kilogram cubs can be admired in the Panda Garden for about an hour every day between 1:30 and 2:30 pm. This is a unique opportunity, as pandas are among the rarest bears in the world. The giant panda is also considered an important ambassador for species conservation; according to the latest estimate, only around 1,800 animals remain in their natural habitat.

'Until now, it was exclusively reserved for our team to observe the growing up of the little pandas. Now, for the first time, we can also allow our visitors to take part,' explains Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. 'Giant pandas are very special animals for us. We hope that the panda cubs will capture the hearts of our guests and at the same time draw attention to the need to protect their natural habitats. Who better to do this than these little bears with their adorable beady eyes?' he adds.

'Panda cubs are still very immature at birth and completely dependent on their mother for care,' explains biologist and curator Dr Florian Sicks. 'Normally, panda mothers only raise one cub. But with animals as endangered as the giant panda, every offspring is of enormous importance. That's why we support Meng Meng and always take turns looking after the cub that is not with its mother.' Strict hygiene measures are observed during the critical first few weeks to ensure the welfare of the cubs. The times when the pandas are visible to visitors are initially limited to one hour. 'We will observe closely how the little pandas react to their new environment and adjust the time window, if necessary,' adds Dr Sicks.

At almost eight weeks old, the two female panda cubs are now stable enough to no longer be dependent on the protective environment of the incubators they inhabited in the first few weeks after their birth on 22 August. While one of the cubs will remain with mum Meng Meng, the second cub will now spend an hour a day in Zoo Berlin's well-tempered indoor enclosure. The cubs are cared for by the animal care team, which includes two experts from the Chengdu Panda Base and has been working round the clock for them since their birth in August. The cubs have been cared for alternately since the beginning: while one stays with its mother, drinks its mother's milk and enjoys her affection and warmth, the other is looked after by the carers. They then switch so that both panda cubs can experience the closeness of their mother.

It will be a while before the twins conquer the Panda Garden together with Meng Meng. However, panda dad Jiao Qing (14) can be seen here all day long, eating bamboo and



relaxing in a separate enclosure for visitors. As in his natural habitat, he is not involved in the rearing of his offspring.

## **Background**

The giant panda is considered the rarest bear on earth. Without conservation measures, it would most likely already be extinct. Only thanks to intensive measures against poaching and the promotion of protected areas and connecting corridors have the populations recovered somewhat, but the giant panda is still categorised 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 baby pandas for the first time. 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 August, Meng Meng gave birth to the second panda twin. 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.