

# Pitter patter pandas?



Excitement and anticipation is again rising in Corstorphine as it gets near to the time when the pandas might just get it together enough for Tian Tian to fall pregnant and produce a baby panda. The right food, the right music is being provided along with a regime of early nights and enclosure swapping.

It is all a bit more scientific than that however, and takes a lot of analysis and attention. Maybe this year?

Iain Valentine, Director of Giant Pandas for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, commented:-“It’s an exciting time at Edinburgh Zoo and we hope to have some news to share soon.

“A combination of methods are used to predict when female pandas go into season, primarily hormone analysis and behavioural observation. So far we’ve been encouraged by both pandas starting to show breeding behaviours much earlier when compared to 2012, which is a sign that they’re nice and settled in their home in Scotland.

“Interestingly, Tian Tian’s behaviour has started to change a lot over the last couple of days – she’s become grumpier, has gone off her food and has become a bit temperamental – basically a different panda to how she normally is.

“Tian Tian has also shown hormone fluctuations a couple of times that suggested we were about to see a hormonal crossover that then tells us the 36 hour breeding window is ten to 14 days away. We’re still to see this indicator and expect it imminently in the test results we receive back from the Centre for Integrative Physiology at the University of Edinburgh

first, and then from Chester Zoo – who both analyse samples of Tian Tian's urine collected twice a day, each and every day.

“The strong behavioural changes seen already in Tian Tian do suggest things are about to start to happen, we just need to wait and see now, and carry on testing and observing.”

“The peak of giant panda breeding season peak is normally mid-April and into May, so this is really still only early days.

“When the important 36 hour window is here Tian Tian and Yang Guang will meet several times to have the opportunity to mate and then, as Tian Tian finally ovulates and her hormones fall off, artificial insemination will also take place.”

If Tian Tian does fall pregnant, it will be second half of July or early August when Edinburgh Zoo experts will be able to tell by using ultrasound scans. The majority of giant panda cubs are then born at the very end of August or beginning of September.