

Edinburgh Zoo Panda keepers on 24 hour watch for cub



Tian Tian

Just as the Fringe is coming to an end in Edinburgh so great excitement builds along the road in Edinburgh Zoo that the female giant panda Tian Tian is truly pregnant with one or possibly two cubs.

From today keepers there are on twenty-four hour alert as hormone test results continue to paint a positive picture for Tian Tian, and the Zoo's breeding programme.

The team of panda keepers now have access to CCTV footage at their homes and Tian Tian is being monitored round the clock for signs of labour. If Tian Tian is pregnant and carries to full term, she will become increasingly restless and her waters will break – just like in human labour. Other labour signs include bleating and spending increased time in her cubbing box.

Chinese panda keeper Haiping Hu, from the China Conservation and Research Centre (CCRCGP), arrived in Edinburgh at the weekend to be on hand if a cub or cubs are born over the next two weeks. Miss Hu has extensive experience in assisting with panda births, especially if twins are born and one cub needs to be removed. New incubators have also arrived and are in place in the panda nursery with keepers prepared for possible round the clock shifts to care for any cub that needs to be hand-reared.

This is still a very sensitive period for panda pregnancy as Tian Tian's body may reabsorb any fetuses or reject them if she is indeed pregnant. To keep her as relaxed as possible, Tian Tian has access to her 'off show' area and she is

currently spending most of her time there where her cubbing box is located. Extra insulation has also been installed in her enclosure to minimise noise.

Iain Valentine, Director of Giant Pandas for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, said:-“What we are seeing in Tian Tian’s hormones is encouraging, but we still cannot guarantee a pregnancy or successful birth. If indeed she is pregnant, this is an extremely risky time for panda pregnancies. Female giant pandas can actually reabsorb any foetuses or reject them if pregnant. If she is pregnant and carries to full term, we believe a cub or cubs could be born anytime over the next two weeks – although there are no certainties we must err on the side of caution and be on red alert from today.”

“Tian Tian’s current routine is to spend a lot of her day sleeping in the cubbing box in her off show indoor enclosure, though she does tend to come outside for a stroll and stretch on her climbing frame in the afternoons. We are keeping the lights switched off for most of the day inside to help mimic the atmosphere of a den that she would seek in the wild.”

Results from Tian Tian’s urine samples have been analysed by colleagues at Memphis Zoo and CCRCGP and both parties remain encouraged. Her progesterone levels are continuing to stay high, which is reflected in her current sleepiness.



Meanwhile the expectant father, Yang Guang is still being shown off to the equally expectant public in his own enclosure next door, much the same as when we visited in April this year.