

Zoo hopeful over panda pregnancy



Edinburgh Zoo announced earlier today that they carried out an artificial insemination procedure on the female giant panda Tian Tian ('Sweetie') last weekend. This followed a drop in the female panda's hormone level during the very short 36 hour breeding window, which meant that natural mating was unlikely to be successful.

The pandas have been off show for a day or two but the public will get back in to have a look at them tomorrow.

The ten year-old pandas have both bred before, although not with each other, but last year Sweetie was definitely pregnant but did not carry the pregnancy to term. Tian Tian previously had twins in 2009 while she was still in China.

The two pandas are living in a climate which is broadly similar to the area of China where they came from, but this is the most northerly place that giant pandas have ever been kept.

These two animals are a big attraction for the zoo, but more importantly they carry with them the hopes of a successful breeding outside China to allow research into breeding methods and the continuation of the species. The zoo say that Scottish expertise in veterinary medicine was one of the main drivers in ensuring that the pandas came here in 2011. Tian Tian and her male companion, Yang Guang, are the only two adult pandas to come out of China and are now on loan to Scotland for 10 years at a cost to the zoo of \$1m per annum.

The Edinburgh Reporter was among a handful of media allowed in to see the pandas today, although Tian Tian was asleep inside

and we were not able to see her. Yang Guang came straight out into his enclosure after it had been cleaned by his keepers and headed for his food. Pandas eat about £70,000 of bamboo each year, most of which is grown in Germany. Some is grown in the grounds of Edinburgh Zoo and there is a display nursery right next to the panda enclosure which visitors can walk around.

We spoke with Iain Valentine about the chances of a successful pregnancy this year.

