

Edinburgh Zoo preparing to send the pandas back to China

When the pandas arrived in 2011 there was a great fuss and anticipation about panda cubs being born in the Scottish capital, but sadly that did not happen.

Now Edinburgh Zoo has announced that the giant pandas Yang Guang and Tian Tian, billed as “rock star” attractions will return to China in early December 2023.

After almost twelve years at Edinburgh Zoo, the wildlife conservation charity said the giant pandas have had an “incredible impact” by connecting millions of people with nature. Sadly their own interactions came to naught, despite a number of unsuccessful attempts at artificial insemination.

The pandas were sent on loan from China as part of a ten-year agreement between The Royal Zoological Society for Scotland (RZSS) and the China Wildlife Conservation Association, which was later [extended by two years](#) mainly due to Covid. The date of their departure is to be finalised which will bring the arrangement to an end under which the Zoo paid £750,000 annually to China to keep the pandas here, in addition to their board and lodging.

Alison Maclean, carnivore team leader at Edinburgh Zoo who has looked after the pandas since they first arrived, even visiting them in China before their journey, said: “We are making arrangements with our partners in China for Yang Guang and Tian Tian to return in early December, possibly during the

first week.

“Visitors to the zoo can expect to see them indoors and outside until the end of November, after which viewing will be outdoors only until they leave.

“Having cared for Yang Guang and Tian Tian since they arrived in 2011, I will be travelling back to China with them, to help them settle into their new homes.

David Field, RZSS chief executive, said: “With more than a million species at risk of extinction and our natural world in crisis, Yang Guang and Tian Tian have had an incredible impact by inspiring millions of people to care about nature.

“Through scientific research alongside the University of Edinburgh, we have also made a significant contribution to our understanding of giant pandas, which will be of real benefit to efforts to protect this amazing species in China.

“It is encouraging that in recent years the outlook for giant pandas in the wild has improved, which gives real hope for the future.”

The giant panda habitat at Edinburgh Zoo will become home to a new species RZSS can support in the wild, which will be announced next year.

“Our vision is of a world where nature is protected, valued and loved, which is why we have made an important pledge to reverse the decline of at least 50 species by 2030.

“We have reached significant milestones recently with the release of wildcats, pine hoverflies and dark bordered beauty moths in the Scottish Highlands.

“With a fantastic home at Edinburgh Zoo, combined with our international expertise in conservation science and research, we have an opportunity to help protect a new species through public engagement here in Scotland and in the wild by working

with global partners.”



Yang Guang PHOTO Laurie Campbell



Tian Tian PHOTO Laurie Campbell