



Berlin, 31 August 2020

Press release

A year of panda-cub cuteness

Zoo Berlin's panda twins celebrate their first birthday

Beetroot replaces chocolate cake, carved carrots stand in for candles, and tasty bamboo provides decorative bunting: the panda twins at Zoo Berlin are celebrating their first birthday today with a delicious ice cake.

Over the past 12 months, brothers Pit and Paule have transformed from tiny wriggling pink babies into big strong bears. At around 28 kilos each, they have put on more than 150 times their birth weight of just under 200 grams. The twins came into the world blind, naked and completely helpless, but are now quite independent and able to nimbly explore their outdoor habitat. "It became apparent early on that Paule was the much more active and adventurous of the two, but Pit has caught up well," says division head Norbert Zahmel. To mark the twins' big day, they were presented with a fresh and fruity ice cake made from beetroot juice, crispy apples, sumptuous sweet potatoes and tasty bamboo. The cubs also received a large pile of snow from the nearby penguin house, and clearly enjoyed the cool playtime.

"Our two real-life Berlin bears Pit and Paule have grown very dear to us over the past year," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "I would like to use this happy occasion to personally thank all our supporters – at home and away," he adds. On 31 August 2019, after several tense and exciting weeks, female panda Meng Meng gave birth to the twin brothers following a gestation period of 147 days. The joyous event came just one week after experts from Zoo Berlin and the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) were able to perform an ultrasound scan that determined Meng Meng was indeed pregnant.

Background:

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 two cubs weighing 186 and 136 grams. Father Jiao Qing (9) is not involved in the rearing of the cubs – as is normal for giant pandas. The most recent estimates suggest that there are only 1,864 adult giant pandas living in their natural habitat worldwide. Giant pandas are therefore classified as "Vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Zoo Berlin pays an annual conservation fee for the honour of keeping the pandas, and 100 percent of that sum goes towards protecting this threatened species. The money is used to fund breeding programmes, habitat conservation

projects, and the reintroduction into the wild of the bamboo-eating bears. Panda pair Meng Meng and Jiao Qing are sponsored by cooperative banking association Berliner Volksbank.

The panda cubs will stay with Meng Meng in Berlin for up to four years. After that, they will leave their mum – as is normal in the wild – and head for China. Pandas are sacred there, and all the world's pandas remain the property of China. That applies to the Berlin babies, too.