



Berlin, 16 August 2016

Press release

## Family planning for Persian leopards

### The EEP has decided: Emil and Shiva are the Predator House's new dream couple

Unlike on TV, finding a partner in real life is rarely as simple – or as fast. Particular care needs to be taken when orchestrating a relationship. From determining the age bracket to viewing the candidates and checking the pair aren't too closely related, matchmaking is no easy task when the survival of an entire species is at stake.

Berlin Zoo participates in a number of species conservation projects, including the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP) for Persian leopards. Following the death of the zoo's elderly male leopard Haakon in March 2016, plans were afoot to find a suitable mate for his three-year-old daughter Shiva – as hopes are always high that these rare animals will reproduce. But successful, long-term family planning needs a solid foundation. In the challenging search for the right mate, curators from zoos all over the world rely on complex databases that clearly list the breed registries and characteristics of their animals. If the animal dating platform comes back with a match, the curator needs to act fast before the chosen candidate is snapped up by someone else.

No one could have predicted that Shiva's Mr Right would turn up just as renovation work was scheduled to begin on the Predator House. Tierpark Nordhorn in Lower Saxony was urgently looking for a new home for its male leopard Emil, born in 2014. The enclosure was too small to house three leopards, and there was a growing risk that Emil would develop an inappropriate interest in his mother or sister. So as not to stand in the way of such a fortuitous match (and healthy leopard cubs), the EEP coordinators and Berlin Zoo decided at short notice to take on Emil despite the upcoming renovation work. And so on 10 August – much sooner than expected – Shiva's future partner Emil arrived in Berlin, where the young, shy male is currently getting acclimatised away from the public eye. "Genetically, Emil is a fantastic match for our Shiva," enthuses curator Heiner Klös. Despite his tender age, Emil is already a bit of a celebrity as he and his sister are the first leopards in captivity to have been born with the help of artificial insemination. That was a real triumph, as hunting and the destruction of their natural habitat has brought Persian leopards to the brink of extinction. Only 1,000 of these animals remain in the wild. Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem is already thinking ahead: "The potential offspring of this pair could make a direct contribution to the survival of the species in the wild."