



27 August 2019

## **Press release**

### **Listen to that beat!**

#### **Ultrasound scan reveals Zoo Berlin is expecting at least one panda baby**

Ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum: this Tuesday, experts performing an ultrasound scan on Zoo Berlin's female panda Meng Meng (6) were delighted to hear the rapid beating of her baby's tiny heart for the very first time. Although the cub is tiny, the birth of Berlin's long-awaited baby panda is not far off now!

Using pieces of apple, panda cookies, and honey water, Zoo Berlin animal keepers were able to persuade Meng Meng to lie on her back for a few minutes this morning so that Prof. Thomas Hildebrandt of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) could perform an ultrasound scan on the now 92 kg bear. Almost 20 weeks after Meng Meng had her first encounter with male panda Jiao Qing, reproduction expert Hildebrandt was able to detect a tiny but powerful heartbeat in her womb. Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem is thrilled about the confirmed pregnancy: "For threatened species like the giant panda, every new baby is a special gift." Panda cubs are born blind and almost naked after a gestation period of three to six months. They usually weigh just 90 to 130 grams – a mere fraction of their mother's weight.

Hormone tests, Meng Meng's behaviour, and the size of the foetus all suggest that the birth will occur in the next week or two. The Zoo Berlin team and visiting reproduction experts from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Sichuan province, China are well prepared for all eventualities. Animal keepers, vets, biologists and Chinese experts are keeping an attentive eye on the mum-to-be, and since last weekend they have also been working night shifts. Over the coming days, they will continue to observe Meng Meng from a discreet distance. "We are staying in the background for now, but are ready to leap into action if necessary," says Knieriem. As male pandas play no role in raising their young, panda dad Jiao Qing is still on view to Zoo visitors.



Panda mothers usually give birth to one or two cubs – in rare cases even three. Although only one heartbeat was detected during the ultrasound scan, there is still a chance of multiple young.

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Germany's only giant pandas moved into Zoo Berlin in summer 2017. According to the data released by the fourth giant panda national survey, there are 1,864 pandas living in the wild. The giant panda is therefore classified as "Vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Zoo Berlin pays an annual loan fee for the honour of keeping the pandas, and 100 percent of that sum is channelled into conservation work such as the breeding, protection and reintroduction into the wild of the beloved bamboo-eating bears. Panda pair Meng Meng and Jiao Qing are sponsored by cooperative banking association Berliner Volksbank.