



Berlin, 21 February 2017

Press release

Topping-out ceremony at the Panda Garden

The Mayor of Berlin hammered in the symbolic nail with his Excellency the Chinese Ambassador and the two building developers

A rather unusual object could be seen suspended from a crane in Berlin today, high above what must be the city's most exotic building site. Where previously only wooden beams, concrete parts and construction machines had swung through the air, today there hung a beautiful topping-out wreath.

Construction work on the new Panda Garden at Zoo Berlin has been progressing at full speed for the past four months. Plans for the new habitat were developed by Berlin firm dan pearlman Experience Architecture in close cooperation with the zoo's management. Work is currently running exactly on schedule, and the habitat should be ready for the pandas to move in this summer. The roof over the indoor section and integrated Panda Plaza is currently being finalised – a construction project milestone that is traditionally celebrated with a topping-out ceremony. This customary event was hosted on 21 February 2017 by Zoo Director Dr Andreas Knieriem and Chairman of the Supervisory Board Frank Bruckmann.

“With this traditional builder's rite, we want to express our thanks to the hardworking and dedicated craftspeople, the competent construction supervisors, and the flexible architects who are all behind this project's rapid progression,” said Knieriem. Bruckmann added: “It is an honour for us, as the developers, to be able to share this important milestone with the Mayor of Berlin Michael Müller and his Excellency the Chinese Ambassador Shi Mingde.” Alongside Müller and Shi, who both delivered heartfelt speeches, were further representatives from China. The Chinese delegates were impressed with the progress of the construction work and their presence served to revive the long history of successful cooperation between Berlin and China.

Construction site foreman Mirko Vegelahn gave the traditional topping-out speech in which he thanked the craftspeople, planners and developers, who, together with the Mayor and Chinese Ambassador, hammered the symbolic final nail into the wood before the topping-out wreath was hoisted high above the panda habitat by crane. As is customary, the foreman then raised a glass to the health of all those involved in the project and the building's future furry inhabitants – with the subsequent smashing of the glass believed to bring luck for the building project. Afterwards, all guests were invited to attend a small German-Chinese reception.

The latest news from the construction site will be shared in regular “construction diary” entries over the coming months via the Panda Blog on the Zoo Berlin website: www.zoo-berlin.de/panda-blog



The history of Berlin's Pandas

On 5 November 1980, Berlin's first panda couple Bao Bao and Tjen Tjen – born in China in 1978 – arrived in the city as a gift from the Chinese leader Hua Guofeng to German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. After the death of female panda Tjen Tjen ("little heaven" in English) in February 1984, Bao Bao ("treasure" or "baby") lived for a while as a bachelor.

In April 1995, Yan Yan ("the beautiful one") arrived at Zoo Berlin on loan from Beijing. Hordes of people formed queues outside the zoo gates to welcome Bao Bao's new lady friend to the city. It was hoped that the pair would go on to bring cute panda cubs into the world, but these hopes failed to materialise despite many attempts. On 26 March 2007, at the age of 22, "the beautiful one" died from obstructed bowels.

On 22 August 2012, Bao Bao finally passed away at the ripe old age of 34. The beloved bear was the oldest living male panda in the world.

On 29 October 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced during a press conference in Beijing that talks had begun on sending a new panda couple to Berlin Zoo. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said: "We, as heads of government, have decided to begin joint research into panda bears. Pandas are a part of China's sovereignty. They will be on display to a large German audience at Berlin's Zoological Garden and will remain there. We will begin talks on the matter immediately."

Since the official announcement, preparations have been in full swing with Berlin architectural firm dan pearلمان. A breeding loan agreement is currently being finalised. A panda contract of this kind is concluded with the respective zoo and stipulates, among other things, the amount of compensation the zoo must pay. The extent of these costs is a confidential part of the contract and will not be made public. With this money, the Chinese government will fund panda species protection projects. In return, Zoo Berlin receives a panda couple from China for 15 years – making it the only zoo in Germany with giant pandas.

Facts and figures

Construction start date: October 2016; date of completion: summer 2017

Size of enclosure: 5,480 m²

Total cost: Almost €10 million

Next steps

- Signing of the contract, scheduled for spring 2017
- Meeting the pandas
- Moving the pandas (quarantine)
- Celebratory opening of the Panda Garden in summer 2017