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## **Press release**

### **Playtime for Pit and Paule**

#### **Zoo Berlin's panda twins get an exciting new toy**

Pit sniffs at the rope ball before giving it a shove with his paw and then chomping into it enthusiastically. A little later, Paule also gets interested in the new toy. Trainee animal keepers at Zoo Berlin have knotted together thick ropes to make a ball for the panda twins, and Pit and Paule are curious to find out what it's all about.

Now that they have (almost) perfected their climbing skills, the cubs have become bold explorers. They sniff and chew everything they come across, and try to clamber over all obstacles – even mum Meng Meng has to function as climbing apparatus during her sons' adventures. Experienced panda keeper Corvin Schmohl showed the trainee keepers how to make sturdy balls for the pandas to play with from untreated natural hemp rope. "Pit and Paule are getting very good at tearing things apart," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "They bite playfully at the wooden planks and are starting to chew on bamboo sticks. But while they still have their milk teeth, the bamboo is nothing more than a toy." The new rope toy will help Pit and Paule to strengthen the muscles they need for chewing, but also to clean their teeth. Pandas' milk teeth usually fall out somewhere between the ages of eight and 17 months, when they are replaced with a set of adult teeth. Currently, the cubs are still getting all the nourishment they need from their mothers' milk. At around ten months of age, they will start feeding on young bamboo leaves.

#### **Background:**

Zoo Berlin has been home to Germany's only giant pandas since summer 2017. On 31 August 2019, female panda Meng Meng (6) 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. 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 loan fee to be able to keep 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.

The panda family are on view during Zoo opening hours. The cubs are just behind the scenes occasionally for weighing, measuring and feeding. There's still plenty of time for fans to pay a visit, as the young pandas won't leave Zoo Berlin until they are two to four years old – the age when pandas in the wild also strike out alone.