Berlin, 26 July 2022

Press release

Two fluffy bundles of joy

Twins born to the red pandas at Tierpark Berlin

Their eyes still firmly shut, the two balls of fur cautiously lift their heads and sniff the air before snuggling in even closer to their mum. What keepers at Tierpark Berlin have suspected for weeks has now been confirmed: female red panda Shine (8) has given birth to adorable twins! Keepers first discovered that offspring had been born on 3 July, but did not know for sure how many. The twins are currently only around the size of guinea pigs. At birth, red pandas weigh around 100 grams and are blind and helpless. They open their eyes for the first time after five weeks or so. “For now, the mother can be seen carrying her young from one den to another,” says curator Dr Florian Sicks. “Tierpark visitors have never been able to see red panda babies this young before. But we still need to cross our fingers and have some patience, as their first veterinary check-up isn’t due for a few more weeks. At that time, the cubs will also get their first vaccinations and their first chip.” Until then, no one will approach the young family and only mother Shine will decide where they spend their time.

“The greatest threat to red pandas is the ongoing destruction of their forest habitat in the Himalayas,” explains Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. “Their natural range extends from northern India to the mountainous regions of Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China – where they occasionally cross paths with their namesake, the giant panda.” Shine and her partner Joel (7) came to Berlin in February 2020 on the recommendation of the red panda Global Species Management Plan (GSMP) from Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park in Darjeeling, India. Their first offspring, a female named Loha, was born that same year after a gestation period of around 130 days. Loha now lives at Belgian zoo Pairi Daiza. In 2021, their son Urs came into the world. This year, he moved to Aalborg Zoo in Denmark. Every baby born to these endangered animals represents a glimmer of hope for the survival of the entire species.

Background:

Red pandas are not actually related to the famous giant panda. Despite their nickname “cat-bear”, they are not part of the bear family *Ursidae*. Yet they do share many characteristics. For example, red pandas live primarily off bamboo. Also, like giant pandas, they have a “false thumb” – an extension of the wrist bone that they use to grasp bamboo stalks. Local football club 1. FC Union Berlin is the sponsor for the Tierpark’s red pandas. Once the sex of the two new cubs has been determined, the club will help the Tierpark in the search for names.

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Did you know?

Red pandas were described by the explorer who discovered them as the “most beautiful mammals in the world”.
The Tierpark introduced its first three red pandas to the public in 1961.
Red pandas have thick hair on the soles of their feet, which stops them slipping and protects them from the cold.
The red panda is also known as the “fire fox”.
Red pandas are more closely related to raccoons than to giant pandas.