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Press release

Hope for the Sumatran tiger

New male tiger comes to Tierpark Berlin

The Sumatran tiger is one of the most endangered big cats on Earth. It is estimated that fewer than 400 of these majestic animals live in the rainforests of Indonesia today – Sumatran tigers are therefore in imminent danger of extinction. But there is a new glimmer of hope for the species at Tierpark Berlin with the arrival of Jae Jae (13). The new male tiger is taking the place of Harfan, who died in 2020 at the age of 12.

Zoological facilities around the world work together to create stable reserve populations of endangered animal species in order to prevent their ultimate extinction. A Global Species Management Plan (GSMP) for the Sumatran tiger unites regional conservation programmes like the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP), helping the initiatives work together to devise global plans that can more effectively protect threatened species.

“Internationally coordinated conservation breeding programmes currently play a big part in ensuring the survival of these threatened big cats,” says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. “So we must do everything we can to prevent the extinction of these unique animals.” Tierpark Berlin has been committed to protecting the rare tigers since the 1950s. A total of 123 Sumatran tigers have been born here, some of whom have been sent around the world to other zoological facilities for breeding purposes.

Baby Sumatran tigers were last born in Berlin in 2018. However, all four cubs from that litter unfortunately have the same disability: misaligned knees that caused cartilage damage. “The cubs underwent extensive clinical and genetic analyses in order to find out what caused this problem,” explains tiger curator Matthias Papies. “The examinations, which were carried out at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) and the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, showed that the quadruplets’ disability was inherited from their father Harfan, who has since passed away.” Harfan died from advanced liver and kidney failure in September 2020 at the age of 12.

The cubs’ health has been continuously monitored over the past two years. Despite various attempts at treatment, no significant improvement has been observed so far. The tigers’ mother Mayang (11) was also examined for genetic defects. Thankfully, no abnormalities were found. On the basis of those findings and following consultation with external experts



from the GSMP, the EEP and the IZW, a decision has been taken to attempt to breed from Mayang once more. And a suitable partner has now been found in the shape of Jae Jae, who came here from Parc des Félin in France. He has already fathered several healthy cubs in the past. Over the coming weeks, Jae Jae and Mayang will spend time getting to know each other in the secluded area at the rear of their main habitat and are not yet on display to Tierpark visitors. The two Indochinese tigers Tarek and Sarai will leave Tierpark Berlin at some point this year to give the Sumatran family more space.