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Press release

Big hopes in small, stripy packages

Four new Sumatran tiger cubs at Tierpark Berlin

Tierpark Berlin is home to four precious new striped cats. Sumatran Tiger Mayang gave birth to the adorable quadruplets on 4 August. Those 16 little paws carry the hopes of conservationists around the world, as Sumatran tigers are a critically endangered species.

The Tierpark's Sumatran tiger couple Harfan (10) and Mayang (7) came to Berlin from Indonesian zoos in late 2013. This year, they welcomed their first-ever offspring. The new mum is very proud of her impressive litter of four: a perfectly even two girls and two boys! The cubs are currently only around the size of rabbits and are still living in the birthing den with mother Mayang, getting all the care they need. Tigers are an altricial species, which means the cubs are helpless for several weeks after birth and need to be constantly supervised by their mother. It is not until they are around two years of age that young tigers gain full independence.

The tiger babies will be able to explore the outdoor habitat once they are strong enough to follow their mother around on their own feet – and once the rocky steps, tree branches and deep ditch no longer present a danger to them. That means Tierpark visitors should be able to admire the cubs from late October.

Currently, only around 350 to 450 tigers live in the rainforests of Sumatra. That makes the Sumatran tiger critically endangered – in fact, it's the most threatened big cat on the planet. "When it comes to animals like the Sumatran tiger, which are at such imminent risk of extinction, every single baby is a huge gift," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "We are delighted to be able to make such an important contribution to the conservation of an entire species." As Harfan and Mayang came to Berlin on loan from the Republic of Indonesia, the cubs also represent a valuable genetic resource for the Sumatran tiger population here in Europe.

Zoos around the world work together to create stable reserve populations for threatened animal species, with the goal of saving them from extinction. There is a Global Species Management Plan (GSMP) for the Sumatran tiger, which brings together all regional breeding and conservation programmes, such as the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP). This overarching, global approach enables plans to be implemented with even greater impact.

The rare tigers have lived at Tierpark Berlin since 1956 – a year after the park opened. The four new babies bring the tally of Sumatran tiger cubs born here to 119. The most recent birth prior to this year was in 2003. Next year the Sumatran tigers should be able to move into a modernised and much larger habitat in the redesigned Alfred Brehm House. Fortunately, the birthing den is in a part of the building that will not be tackled until a later construction phase, so the young tigers can grow up in peace and quiet.