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Press release

A spring in her step

Tierpark Berlin's polar bear cub is practising for her first trip outside

Polar bear mum Tonja is happily snoozing, but her little daughter is clearly not in the mood for a nap. She mischievously nips at her mother's mighty paw, clambers over her broad back, and sniffs inquisitively at the air. It looks like our cheeky furball is ready to explore the outside world!

The young polar bear had her first veterinary exam two weeks ago, and now mother and cub are receiving daily visits from the keepers. Polar bear curator Dr Florian Sicks reports that Tonja has been eating again since late January, "and the little bear is also getting interested in solid food. Every now and again she nibbles at a piece of meat." Before retreating to the maternity den last October, Tonja had put on around 160 kg. For three months she lived entirely off the thick layer of fat she had accumulated in the spring and summer. Now she receives a small portion of meat every day along with a tasty mix of carrots, lettuce and apples. The cub is keen to sample the menu every now and again, but she still regularly drinks her mother's milk.

Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem is delighted with the cub's development: "We are very pleased. She is a cheeky little thing, just as a young polar bear should be, and certainly tests her mother's patience." Tonja, however, remains calm and composed, merely pushing her over-exuberant daughter away every now and again with a huge but gentle paw. "She really is an excellent mother," adds Knieriem. Mother and cub are expected to be on view for Tierpark visitors from mid-March, when they will start spending time in the outdoor area.

Just a few days before International Polar Bear Day, which takes place tomorrow, Tierpark Berlin received a visit from Alysa McCall, a scientist with Polar Bears International. McCall and Sicks discussed the recent progress made by her organisation, which receives annual contributions from Berlin's zoos. "Financial support from Berlin has allowed us, among other things, to set up cameras around polar bear dens in Norway so that we can more precisely study the rearing of cubs in the bears' natural habitat," McCall reported.



Background:

Tierpark Berlin's female polar bear Tonja (9) gave birth to her cub on 1 December 2018, at 2:33 a.m. At that time, it was the size of a guinea pig. The cub's father, Wolodja (7), is not involved in raising the young. This is usual in the wild, as polar bears are solitary animals. Wolodja now lives at Ouwehands Zoo in Rhenen, the Netherlands. When the cub was first examined by vets on 14 February, she measured 61 centimetres from head to tail and weighed an impressive 8.5 kilograms. But although the cub is developing well, there is always an element of risk – just as with young polar bears in the wild.

The polar bears are currently not on view to Tierpark visitors. In zoos just as in the wild, mothers and their cubs do not leave their dens until the spring. The young polar bear is still nameless. Tierpark Berlin will decide on a name together with the cub's sponsor. We have already received several requests for sponsorship. Anyone else interested should send an e-mail to patenschaft@tierpark-berlin.de.