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Press release

Christmas with the polar bears

A quiet festive season in the birthing den at Tierpark Berlin

How was Christmas for the polar bear family at Tierpark Berlin? Well, fairly low-key to be honest. But what they lacked in Christmas dinner and carolling, they made up for with plenty of cuddling and drinking.

Curator Dr Florian Sicks was allowed to have his phone at the dinner table over Christmas this year. Although the most critical period for the young polar bear is now over, at four weeks of age the cub is by no means out of the woods. The curator has to constantly check that mother and baby are doing well via the live video feed from the den. And he enters data into his computer every hour. "The video footage has shown me that the little bear has got quite chubby over Christmas," he smiles. "And it is becoming more and more active." Department head Andrea Fleischer and her team of keepers are also delighted to see that the bear is putting on weight. "It takes a whole team to run a successful zoo," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "We are proud of our committed employees who have been holding down the fort over Christmas. It is good to know we can count on them 365 days a year."

The keepers are still staying away from the birthing den for now. No veterinarian will attempt to examine the cub until it no longer requires the constant presence of mother Tonja (9). That should be the case in about a month. But leaving the family alone isn't easy for the keepers and vets when they are constantly exposed to adorable images from the birthing den camera. As the new year approaches, everyone shares one main wish for 2019: a healthy, happy polar bear cub!

Background:

Tierpark Berlin's female polar bear Tonja gave birth to her cub on 1 December 2018, at 2:33 a.m. She had mated with male bear Wolodja (7) several times in March and April. In the summer, Wolodja moved to Zoo Berlin to give Tonja plenty of peace and quiet for her presumed pregnancy and birth. In the wild too, polar bears are solitary animals, and males are not involved in raising the young.

Infant mortality in polar bears is extremely high. In the wild, around 85 percent of polar bears do not live past their second birthday. Because absolute peace and quiet is crucial for the successful rearing of young polar bears, no one will approach the birthing den over the next few weeks.

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.



World's biggest land predator in danger

Rising global temperatures are causing the Arctic ice to melt. That means the polar bears' territory, formerly so vast, is rapidly shrinking. Polar bears cannot hunt for seals in the water. And should the Arctic snowfall turn to rain, both seal and polar bear mothers will not be able to build the protective dens they need for their young. These conditions are making life increasingly difficult for polar bears in the Arctic. With fewer chances to catch seals, hungry polar bears become ever weaker and the survival chances of their young drop alarmingly.

Zoo and Tierpark Berlin give financial support to conservation organisation **Polar Bears International**, helping it to monitor and analyse changes in the bears' breeding and hunting behaviour and identify their preferred retreats and migration routes. The organisation aims to use the findings of its research to establish protected areas where the bears will be able to find sufficient food and rear their young in peace. For more information, visit <https://www.tierpark-berlin.de/de/natur-und-artenschutz/artenschutz-weltweit/eisbaer>.
