

Groundbreaking panda birth
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By Aishah Afandi

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 — After a barren mating season last year, giant panda Liang Liang created history of sorts for Malaysia after giving birth on Tuesday to her second cub in less than three years.

“This is such a beautiful, meaningful miracle. Normally, it takes between six and eight years for pandas in captivity to give birth again,” said Giant Panda Conservation Centre Zoology and Veterinary director Dr Mat Naim Ramli.

“We did not know she was pregnant until August 7 when we collected a blood sample and found her estrogen levels were extremely high.

“But we could not confirm it as she did not allow us to get a second sample. We monitored her behaviour closely after that.”

Liang Liang’s first cub, a male, was born in 2013 in China on the same date as her new baby — August 18.

Staff at the centre believe Liang Liang, who was known as Feng Yi before arriving in Malaysia, conceived after a mating session on May 7 that lasted 20 minutes with her mate, Xing Xing.

Their mating session could make it into the record books as the previous longest mating duration between two giant pandas was clocked at 18 minutes.

“Twenty minutes for giant pandas is considered long. I will have to check if this is the longest,” said Dr Mat Naim.

Liang Liang is fiercely protective of her cub, making it difficult for staff to determine its gender.

They are, however, “90 per cent sure” it is a female.

Liang Liang gave birth at 2pm after 15 minutes of labour to the pink and hairless cub.

“It was a smooth delivery,” he said.

“We knew she was in labour when we heard a ‘scream’ and saw amniotic fluid around her at 1.45pm.”

He said the staff only managed to hold the cub for few minutes to measure and weigh it when Liang Liang let go of her baby.

“Liang Liang then chased them off and they ran out of the enclosure,” he said.

“The cub was only taken away for four minutes because Liang Liang was wailing for her baby.”

While Xing Xing, formerly known as Fu Wa, carries on with life as usual at the centre, Liang Liang, who was pregnant for 104 days, has not let go of her baby.

She also has not eaten since the birth and will be on a glucose and salt water diet for the time being.

The cub, which weighs 175g and is 20cm in length, will be nursed by its mother for the next six months and will subsequently be on a diet of bamboo shoots.

Dr Mat Naim also said the baby would only change to their signature black and white colour after more than a month.

Zoo Negara education department senior executive Junaidi Omar said with the presence of the pandas in the country, the public can now learn and understand the animals better.

The centre will keep the cub for two years before it is sent to China.

Junaidi also said there would be a routine inspection by experts from China in November to see the progress of the breeding research being conducted in Malaysia.

The pandas arrived on May 21 last year from Chengdu, China, through the Giant Panda International Conservation Cooperation Agreement Programme.

They will be here for 10 years to give Malaysia a chance to carry out panda-related conservation research and develop local expertise on the animals.

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