

It's a girl: Thai zoo says panda cub is doing well

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A handout photo released by Chiang Mai zoo on May 27, 2009 shows a new born panda. The one-day-old cub born after years of artificial insemination and efforts to get its celibate parents to mate is a healthy female with a loud cry, a zoo official said Thursday.

A one-day-old panda cub born in Thailand after years of artificial insemination and efforts to get its celibate parents to mate is a healthy female with a loud cry, a zoo official said Thursday.

Giant panda Lin Hui surprised workers at Chiang Mai [zoo](#) by giving birth to the as-yet-unnamed 200-gram (eight-ounce) cub on Wednesday and director Thanapath Pongpamorn said mother and baby were doing well.

"An expert said after examining them that the cub is a healthy female

with a loud crying voice. Lin Hui is taking care of her cub well, she licks and feeds her cub," Thanapath told AFP.

The expert had advised round-the-clock care for the pair, he said, and visitors had been banned for at least a month in order to avoid excessive noise while the cub is developing.

The zoo will hold a public competition to name her, Thanapath said.

Eight-year-old Lin Hui gave birth to the cub just three months after receiving semen from nine-year-old partner Chuang Chuang.

The panda pair had shown no interest in reproducing the traditional way since they both arrived on a 10-year loan from China in 2003. The cub will officially belong to China but will stay with Thailand on a two-year loan.

In 2006, Chuang Chuang, who had been deemed too heavy to mate with Lin Hui, lost seven kilograms (15 pounds) on a low-carbohydrate diet, and was then shown 15-minute video clips of successful panda couplings, but to no avail.

Lin Hui was first artificially inseminated in April 2007 but failed to become pregnant. The zoo tried a different approach in January, when a cold snap in the northern city prompted an unusually frisky response from Lin Hui.

Authorities took the pair out of their climate-controlled environment in the hope of provoking a steamy response during the pandas' mating season, but again without any luck.

Giant pandas, notorious for their low sex drive, are among the planet's most endangered animals. Nearly 1,600 pandas are believed to survive in

the wild in China and about 180 are being raised in captivity in zoos worldwide.

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