

San Diego Zoo panda gives birth to 5th cub

August 5 2009, By ELLIOT SPAGAT , Associated Press Writer



This image provided by the San Diego Zoo shows a new panda birth, upper right, captured Wednesday Aug. 5, 2009 via a closed-circuit camera in the birthing den in the zoo in San Diego. It was the fifth birth for mother, Bai Yun. The sex of the mostly hairless, pink newborn, which is about the size of a stick of butter, will not be known for some time, and it will be approximately one month before the iconic black-and-white coloration of a giant panda becomes visible. (AP Photo/San Diego Zoo, Ken Bohn)

(AP) -- Prized San Diego Zoo panda Bai Yun gave birth Wednesday to her fifth cub after a 130-day pregnancy that zookeepers said ended with an apparently pleasant labor.

The cub born to 17-year-old Bai Yun (White Cloud) became just the 14th panda in the United States, five of which are in San Diego.

Shortly before the birth, the mother licked herself, rolled on her back to

grab her hind legs and stood on her head.

"We saw a contraction and then about five seconds later, we just heard a wailing cry of the cub. ... It was a very vocal cub, it was like whoa. ... It's got a really good set of lungs," veterinarian Dr. Meg Sutherland-Smith said at a news conference.

"She really had, I think, a very pleasant labor, not that I would know, but she didn't have seemingly as much discomfort or moving about as what we've seen in the past," she said.

Bai Yun seemed comfortable with the cub and appeared to start nursing about 30 minutes after birth.

"She knows she's been there, done that," Sutherland-Smith said.

A second [fetus](#) had been detected, but it was probably absorbed in the mother's uterus.

The pink, nearly hairless panda newborn weighed about 4 ounces and is about the size of a stick of butter. Its gender won't be known for several weeks, until officials can get a better look, and it won't get a name for 100 days, in line with Chinese tradition.

Mom and cub will lead private lives for the next four months or so, but they will appear on the zoo's live Panda Cam, which can be watched online.

Bai Yun, who weighs about 300 pounds, was born in a breeding center in China and arrived in San Diego in 1996.

The zoo announced last week that Bai Yun was pregnant, based on ultrasound tests.

The father is longtime consort Gao Gao (Big Big), who has fathered three of Bai Yun's other cubs.

The number of cubs makes the pair one of the most reproductively successful panda couples ever in captivity.

Pandas are notoriously poor breeders - one reason their species is endangered - and females have only three days a year in which they can conceive. Only about 1,600 giant pandas remain in the wild, and around 200 live in captivity, said the zoo's conservation program specialist, Megan Owen.

Bai Yun and Gao Gao come together only a couple days a year. When Bai Yun enters her fertile periods, zookeepers make sure Gao Gao is there, sniffing her through a perforated gate zookeepers call a "howdy door" until her chirps and bleats indicate she's ready to get down to business.

Bai Yun gave birth to her first cub in 1999 through artificial insemination from her first arranged suitor, Shi Shi (Stone). Hua Mei (China/U.S.A.) was the first giant panda cub born in the United States after a decade of failed breeding attempts. She has had three sets of twins since returning to China in 2003.

The Chinese government has a right to bring the new panda cub to China when it turns 4, said Carmi Penny, curator of mammals at the zoo.

Gao Gao, who was born in the wild, arrived in San Diego in 2003 after veterinarians gave up on Shi Shi, who turned out to be older and less virile than originally believed and was returned to China. Shi Shi died last year.

Some males never succeed at natural breeding, so artificial insemination

has become common practice when breeding captive [pandas](#).

On the Net:

<http://www.sandiegozoo.org>

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Citation: San Diego Zoo panda gives birth to 5th cub (2009, August 5) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-08-san-diego-zoo-panda-birth.html>

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