

# China sends panda expert to Taiwan to aid breeding

November 8 2009

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In this Aug. 1, 2009 photo, a giraffe from Africa's most endangered giraffe subspecies stands in the bush near Koure, Niger. By all accounts, they should be extinct. Instead, their numbers have quadrupled to 200 since 1996, an unlikely boon experts credit to the concurrence of an impoverished government keen for revenue that has enacted laws to protect them, a conservation program that encourages people to support them, and a rare harmony with humans who have accepted their presence. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

(AP) -- Nothing like a little time apart to rekindle the affections that could lead to a baby panda.

So says a panda expert sent by China to Taiwan to advise on how to encourage mating by the pair given by Beijing last December to mark the two sides' growing friendship.

After inspecting the [pandas](#) at the Taipei Zoo on Sunday, Chinese panda expert Zhang Hemin suggested a separation of a month or two might

boost the feeling of attraction needed to reproduce.

"They may have more interest toward each other after a brief separation," said Zhang, a researcher at the Wolong Natural Reserve in western Sichuan province where the pandas are from.

China presented Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan, which together mean "reunion," to Taiwan last December amid warming ties between the mainland and the island, which split amid civil war in 1949.

They have proved popular and many Taiwanese now wish to see them produce a baby in their new home.

Zhang said the environment at the Taipei Zoo was natural enough and would not hamper their breeding, but the animals may have become too used to each others' presence.

Zhang also suggested that to prepare the male, Tuan Tuan, for the vital mating act, the zookeepers should set up more wooden racks so he can climb around and strengthen his hind legs.

If all works, the much anticipated act could come during the pandas' brief mating season in February, Zhang said.

Pandas are threatened by a low reproduction rate. Females in the wild normally have a cub once every two to three years, and the fertility of captive giant pandas is even lower, experts say.

Only about 1,600 pandas live in the wild, mostly in China's Sichuan province. An additional 120 are in Chinese breeding facilities and zoos, and about 20 live in zoos outside China.

China initially offered the pandas to Taiwan in 2005, but the then pro-

independence government of Chen Shui-bian rejected the gift as propaganda to push for unification. After Ma Ying-jeou of the rival Nationalist Party was inaugurated in May last year, he accepted the offer.

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