

Chinese pandas get warm welcome in Toronto

March 25 2013



A giant panda is pictured at Edinburgh Zoo, Scotland, on August 14, 2012. Canada welcomed two cute and furry ambassadors on Monday—giant pandas on loan from China for 10 years to mark a warming of Sino-Canadian ties.

Canada welcomed two cute and furry ambassadors on Monday—giant pandas on loan from China for 10 years to mark a warming of Sino-

Canadian ties.

Er Shun and Da Mao landed in Toronto after a nearly 24-hour journey from the Research Base For [Giant Panda](#) Breeding in Chengdu, China, aboard a transport jet stocked with in-flight meals of bamboo and apples.

Their arrival was televised live on all major networks across Canada.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper—who secured the panda loan on his second official trip to China last year after much criticism for having been slow to develop bilateral relations—signed for the FedEx delivery.

"I'm truly delighted to host in Canada two great representatives from China, Er Shun and Da Mao," Harper said in a speech on the tarmac at the Toronto airport.

"Over the coming years these pandas will help us to learn more about one another while serving as a reminder of our deepening relationship, a relationship based on mutual respect and collaboration," he said.

Zoos in Toronto and Calgary will host the animal pair, with keepers hoping they will reproduce while they are in Canada. The Toronto zoo is planning to open its panda exhibit in May, after a quarantine period.

It has been more than 20 years since a Canadian zoo has hosted a visiting panda, whose natural habitat is mountainous southwestern China.

Er Shun, the five-year-old female whose name translates as "Double Smoothness," was characterized by her handlers as "docile, yet lively." Her mate Da Mao, or "Big Fur," is said to be a "lively and tender gentleman."

Recalling his wife Lauren cradling a [baby panda](#) during the couple's visit to China, Harper said: "They do wiggle. They're shy. Just ask Lauren."

Harper was a vocal critic of China's human rights abuses during his first term in office, but more recently has focused on trade.

By tripling exchanges over the last decade, [China](#) has become Canada's second-largest trading partner, after the United States.

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