

Japan zoo gives pandas privacy as mating season starts

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Shin Shin, a female giant panda, walks in her enclosure at Ueno zoo in Tokyo on March 4, 2014

A Tokyo zoo is to shutter its panda display in an effort to encourage the famously lethargic creatures to concentrate on mating without the distraction of spectators, a spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Starting Thursday, Shin Shin and her companion Ri Ri will be given a bit of alone time at Ueno Zoo after she began exhibiting signs that she was ready to procreate.

"Shin Shin is moving around more often and bleating like a sheep, a sign that it is [mating](#) season," the spokeswoman said.

"The two have good chemistry and we all hope the couple will bear a healthy new baby," she said.

The couple captivated Japan in 2012 when Shin Shin gave birth to a cub, the first [giant panda](#) born at the [zoo](#) in 24 years.

However, the baby bear died from pneumonia a short time later, an event that provoked newsflashes on national television.

Despite the weight of public expectations, last year's [mating season](#) was unsuccessful.

Pandas, whose natural habitat lies in mountainous southwestern China, have a low reproductive rate and are under pressure from factors such as habitat loss.

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