

# Hong Kong expecting first ever panda birth: keepers

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Pandas Le Le and Ying Ying (right) chew on bamboo shoots on their joint fourth birthday at Ocean Park in Hong Kong on August 9, 2009

It's a happy moment that's been a long time coming, but after years of trying, Hong Kong panda Ying Ying is finally expecting a cub, keepers said Thursday, a first ever for the southern Chinese city.

The 10-year-old panda began showing signs of pregnancy in July, after several attempts—both natural and artificial—at insemination, said a spokeswoman for Ocean Park, where the animal lives.

In early September, China-born Ying Ying started eating less, sleeping more and displayed heightened sensitivity to sound and her surroundings, she added.

"After repeated [ultrasound scans](#) conducted in late September, it was confirmed that Ying Ying is carrying a foetus."

Her baby would be the first [giant panda](#) born in Hong Kong, and officials said they were "cautiously optimistic" about the pregnancy.

But—pandas being tricky animals—it's not a done deal yet, warned the park's vet, who said it was possible she could reabsorb or miscarry the foetus.

A team of specialists has been assigned to keep an eye on her and park managers are trying to make the mum-to-be as comfortable as possible.

"To provide Ying Ying with the best pre- and post-natal care, we have minimised noises and disturbances in her environment and extended our monitoring to 24 hours a day," said Suzanne Gendron, head of Zoological Operations and Education at the park.

Female pandas are only interested in mating for three days a year, and have a gestation period of three to five months.

If all goes according to plan, Ying Ying is expected to deliver in about one week.

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