

Get a room! Tokyo zoo's bashful pandas try for a baby

February 4 2016, by Alastair Himmer



Ri Ri, a male giant panda, eats in his enclosure at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo on February 2, 2016

Two giant pandas at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo have been given some private time in a bid to create a romantic environment in which the bashful creatures can mate.

Public viewing was halted on Thursday in the hope that male Ri

Ri—who zookeepers confirmed has looked friskier in recent days—will take advantage of the fleeting window that female Shin Shin is in heat.

"There's really only a couple of days a year when a panda can get pregnant," a spokesman from Ueno Zoo's education department told AFP.

"Pandas are solitary animals and the only time you will see them together is the [mating season](#).

"Usually they just sit apart from each other chewing their food, but Ri Ri has been looking more amorous of late."

The cuddly creatures, both 10 years old, have a choice of two rooms in which to snuggle up to one another, although officials insist they will not interfere with the courting process.

"There is a spare recreational room for them out the back," said the spokesman. "But we won't be giving them any special food or dimming the lights for them.

"Nobody knows what kind of mood to create for animals to feel romantic," he added. "They don't just get into the mood with soft lighting like humans."



Female giant panda Shin Shin (R) eats in her enclosure at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo on February 2, 2016 as male giant panda Ri Ri can be seen in the background

Shin Shin, who was brought from China five years ago, just before the devastating tsunami in Japan's northeast, gave birth to a baby in 2012 but the cub died from pneumonia six days later. She had a phantom pregnancy in 2013 and the pandas have not bred since.

Giant pandas are notoriously clumsy at mating, with males said to be bad at determining when a female is in the right frame of mind and often befuddled at knowing what to do next.

In the event the animals do feel compatible, sex is frequently over too quickly to impregnate the female, who is only receptive to the proposition for two or three days a year between February and May.

"It's true the females are picky," the zoo spokesman said. "In their

natural habitat, they get to select the male."

According to estimates, less than 2,000 [giant pandas](#) remain in the wild, in three provinces in south-central China.

Should Shin Shin rebuff Ri Ri's advances for a third straight year, Ueno Zoo will consider artificial insemination, the official confirmed.

"It remains an option but we'll see how they get on first," he said.

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