

# It's a girl: Japan zoo's star panda baby gets a checkup

June 23 2017, by Yuri Kageyama

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This Thursday, June 22, 2017 image released by Tokyo Zoological Park Society, shows a 10-day giant panda cub at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. Ueno Zoo said Friday, June 23, 2017 the panda, born on June 12, was ruled a female by examining experts. The still nameless cub has been doing well, drinking mother ShinShin's milk. Panda cubs gradually get black markings on their ears, eyes and paws, and the spots were starting to show. (Tokyo Zoological Park Society via AP)

The baby panda who has become an overnight celebrity in Japan is a girl.

Tokyo's Ueno Zoo said Friday the panda, born June 12, was ruled a female by examining experts.

It's difficult to determine the gender of a panda newborn. The zoo had also been careful not to separate the baby from her mother, and the two short periods they took her away were not enough to determine the sex.

The still nameless cub has been doing well, drinking mother ShinShin's milk.

Giant panda cubs gradually get black markings on their ears, eyes and paws, and the spots were starting to show. The zoo released a photo that showed a pinkish mouse-like creature with some dark spots on its body. Earlier video showed the mother gently cradling the cub and apparently giving it breastmilk.

The nearly 18-centimeter (7-inch) panda won't be in public view for months, probably about half a year, according to the zoo. But the zoo is already drawing crowds in this nation that has an acute weakness for "kawaii," or cute, things.

And Japanese media have been feeding practically daily reports on the little panda as well as footage of children getting excited at the zoo. The public is being solicited to give her a name, although details are still sketchy.

In 2012, the last cub born at the zoo, also ShinShin's, survived only six days.

Kansai University professor Katsuhiro Miyamoto estimates Tokyo's economy will get a 26.7 billion yen (\$240 million) lift from the baby, including panda-related goods, zoo admission fees and other spending over the next year.

The zoo said the mother was also doing well, eating bamboo and drinking water. The zoo will continue to monitor both of them 24 hours, although their conditions appear stable, it said.

The fact the baby has survived more than 10 days is a good sign, although it remains fragile for the first few months, according to experts.

The first panda to be born in captivity in Japan was in 1985, at Ueno Zoo, and it lived only 43 hours.

About 420 giant pandas live in captivity, mostly in their native China, while about 1,860 live in the wild. China for decades has gifted friendly nations with its unofficial national mascot in what is known as "panda diplomacy." The country more recently has loaned pandas to zoos on commercial terms.

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