

Giant panda 'believed' pregnant at Edinburgh Zoo (Update)

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This is a Monday, Dec 16, 2013 file photo of giant panda named Tian Tian, seen exploring her enclosure at Edinburgh Zoo in Edinburgh, Scotland. Officials at Edinburgh Zoo said Tuesday Aug. 12, 2014 they believe a female giant panda is finally pregnant after months of anticipation. The zoo said that the latest scientific data it has suggests that Tian Tian, Chinese for Sweetie, has conceived following artificial insemination in April and may give birth at the end of the month. However, officials cautioned y that they would not be certain until Tian Tian gives birth. (AP Photo/Scott Heppell/, File)

A giant panda at a Scottish zoo appears to be finally pregnant after months of dashed hopes and anticipation.

Edinburgh Zoo said Tuesday the latest scientific data it has suggests that Tian Tian—Chinese for Sweetie—has conceived following artificial insemination in April, and may give birth at the end of the month.

Experts are closely monitoring the hormone and protein levels in the animal's urine on a daily basis, but officials cautioned they would not be certain until Tian Tian gives birth.

"This is all very new and complex science and we still have a bit of time to go yet, as like last year, the late loss of a cub remains entirely possible," said Iain Valentine at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.

Tian Tian became pregnant last year, also after artificial insemination, but appeared to have reabsorbed the fetus late term. Before that, she was reluctant to mate with male companion Yang Guang—Sunshine—despite encouragement from zoo officials.

Giant pandas have difficulty breeding and their pregnancies are notoriously difficult to follow because the animals experience "pseudo-pregnancies"—their behavior and hormonal changes do not indicate for certain whether they are pregnant or not.

The mammals' fetuses do not start to develop until the final weeks of gestation.

Tian Tian and Yang Guang, both aged 10, arrived from China in 2011. They are the only pandas in Britain.

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