

Giant Panda Gives Birth to Twins at Zoo Atlanta

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For the first time since 1987 giant panda twins were born in the U.S. at Zoo Atlanta Monday in Atlanta, Ga. The cubs were the first giant pandas born in the U.S. in 2013.

The twins, born at 6:21 and 6:23 p.m, respectively, were born to Lun Lun and Yang Yang, both 15-year-old giant pandas. The zoo used artificial insemination in March and was only expecting a single panda cub to be born.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Lun Lun’s and Yang Yang’s twins,” Raymond B. King, President and CEO of Zoo Atlanta, said in a press release.

The cubs have yet to be named.

When twins are born in the wild, which is common for the species, usually one will die due to neglect from the mother. Pandas are generally solitary animals.

Giant panda twins typically survive in zoos. They are very small when they are born and during the first few months, there is a high risk of death to giant panda twins because of their fragile size.

Lun Lun will only care for one cub at a time, as it is what giant pandas are accustomed to in the wild. Currently one is with The Animal Management and Veterinary Team at the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation Giant Panda Center while the other is with Lun Lun.

The Animal Management and Veterinary Teams will base their strategy for the cubs’ care on Lun Lun’s behavior and the cubs’ health during the next few months, which are critical to the health of both Lun Lun and her cubs.

Lun Lun’s cubs can be rotated to ensure each receive an equal share of maternal care and to not overexert the mother if necessary. “Zoo Atlanta and our animal care teams, who will no doubt be extremely busy over the next few months,” King said.

Lun Lun is an experienced mother, but never to twins. Lun Lun has given birth twice before to Xi Lan, 4, and Po, 2.

Xi Lan and Po will remain on exhibit, along with the cubs’ father, Yang Yang, at Zoo Atlanta. They will not have contact with Lun Lun or the cubs for some time, officials said.

“Twins are an entirely new scenario for Lun Lun,” King said.

Zoo visitors should expect to see the new cubs sometime this fall, zoo spokeswoman Keisha Hines said.

The twins are just the newest addition to Zoo Atlanta's history of giant panda preservation, which began in 2006 with the birth of Mei Lan. Lun Lun's twins are the fourth and fifth addition to the zoo's list of panda births.

"This is a success we share with all of our fellow zoological organizations working to understand and protect this iconic species, and we share our joy with our local community and with our colleagues in China," King said.

It is believed that fewer than 1,600 giant pandas remain in the wild today. Zoo Atlanta funds the support of giant pandas living in nature reserves across China, recently receiving International Conservation Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for its commitment to the preservation of the species.