

**Dec. 4, 2009**

## **National Zoo's Young Giant Panda to Go to China per Agreement**

Tai Shan (tie-SHON), the first surviving giant panda cub born at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, will be sent to the People's Republic of China in early 2010, as stipulated in the agreement between the Zoo and the Chinese government. The exact date of his departure has not been determined due to the lengthy process of finalizing permits and preparing Tai Shan for the trip.

Under the agreement, giant panda cubs born at the National Zoo belong to China and are to be sent to the Wolong's Beifengxia Base in Ya'an, Sichuan sometime after the cub turns two. In April 2007, shortly before his second birthday, China granted the National Zoo a two-year extension for Tai Shan to remain in Washington, D.C.; that extension expired in July but the Zoo was provided a second extension to January 2010.

Tai Shan, whose name means "peaceful mountain" in Chinese, will be trained to enter and calmly remain in a specially designed crate for his flight to China. Logistics and details for the safe transport of the panda are being finalized. It is expected that Tai Shan will enter the breeding program in China, where he will contribute to species conservation.

Tai Shan was born at 3:41 a.m. July 9, 2005, weighing only a few ounces at birth. The first cub for mother Mei Xiang (may-SHONG) and father Tian Tian (tee-YEN tee-YEN), he was conceived through artificial insemination March 11, 2005, in a procedure performed by National Zoo scientists and veterinarians.

Mei Xiang and Tian Tian also belong to China and are on a 10-year loan as part of a research, conservation and breeding program. This agreement expires in December 2010. National Zoo and Chinese officials will not begin negotiations about their future until spring 2010.

Since his public debut in December 2005, Tai Shan has delighted millions of visitors who have come to the Fujifilm Giant Panda Habitat at the National Zoo to see him. He also has touched fans from around the world through the Zoo's giant panda Webcam, which has drawn millions of visitors annually since his birth.

"Tai Shan leaving Washington is terribly sad for the Zoo, the community and his fans around the world," said acting National Zoo Director Steve Monfort. "He has become so special

to the staff and the public—and we have learned so much from him in just four short years. By providing a two-year extension, our Chinese partner, the China Wildlife Conservation Association, allowed us the chance to learn more about giant pandas by charting his growth and development. It's hard to say goodbye, but we are so thankful for the many memories and huge opportunities Tai has provided to the National Zoo.”

The National Zoo is a recognized leader in the care and study of the giant panda. The Zoo has worked for decades to conserve this endangered species and intends to continue its commitment to giant panda research *in situ* and at the Zoo. About 1,600 giant pandas exist in the wild and nearly 300 live in zoos and research facilities in China and around the world.

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