

2 pandas to leave for Germany for 15-year research



Photo taken on May 3, 2017 shows giant panda “Meng Meng” at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, capital of southwest China’s Sichuan Province. Giant pandas “Meng Meng” and “Jiao Qing” took a chartered flight on June 24 from Chengdu to settle in their new home at the Berlin Zoo in Berlin, Germany, on a 15-year research mission. “Meng Meng”, a female, is four years old, and “Jiao Qing” is a seven-year-old male. (Xinhua)

Giant pandas Meng Meng and Jiao Qing will take a chartered flight from Chengdu Saturday to settle in their new home in Berlin Zoo, Germany, on a 15-year research mission.

The furry ambassadors will be accompanied by two Chinese keepers, Berlin Zoo’s senior vet, 1,000 kilograms of bamboo and a large number of biscuits.

Meng Meng, a female, is four years old, and loves being on camera and sleeping, while Jiao Qing is a seven-year-old male, who is very active and loves physical activity.

They were both born at Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. Berlin Zoo has been preparing for their arrival since October.

“We have built new enclosures in an area of 5,500 square meters, neighboring the oldest enclosures, built for antelopes and giraffes in 1871,” said Andreas Ochs, a senior veterinarian at the zoo.

Berlin weather is more agreeable than in Chengdu, so the pandas can stay outside for the whole year, according to Ochs.

The zoo has planned a 1,000 square-meter outside enclosure for each panda and a 250 square-meter inside area, as well as room for treatment, storing bamboo and quarantine.

To better host the bears, the zoo has sent a team to China to learn specific skills to care for them.

"We have learned to design enclosures for keeping the bears and how to go into the cage and remove the baby bear for nursing and to return it to the mother again once the couple give birth," Ochs said.

China has gifted three pandas to Germany since the early 1980s. Bao Bao and Tian Tian were the first panda couple in Berlin Zoo, though Tian Tian died in 1982.

Bao Bao remained alone until Yan Yan was loaned to the zoo in 1995 to breed. However, breeding attempts were unsuccessful despite trying artificial insemination seven times.

Thirty-four-year-old Bao Bao died in Berlin in 2012, as the oldest male panda in the world.

"Jiao Qing is grown-up now and Meng Meng will be ready to mate in two years. We expect to see their baby born in Berlin," said Yin Hong, Meng Meng's keeper in Chengdu.

China Wildlife Conservation Association and Berlin Zoo signed a 15-year contract in April. The research team at Chengdu Base singled the panda pair out based on their health, age and hereditary genes, said Yin.

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Germany.

"They are envoys for China-Germany friendship. All the people in Berlin are looking forward to seeing this pair of pandas soon," Ochs said.