

Hong Kong's pandas say goodbye to public in mating season

In anticipation of the upcoming mating season of female giant panda Ying Ying and male giant panda Le Le, Giant Panda Adventure (GPA) of the Hong Kong Ocean Park is temporarily closed from Saturday until further notice, the park announced.

Suzanne Gendron, Executive Director of Zoological Operations and Education of the park, said both pandas have recently displayed oestrus behaviors such as water play and vocalizations by Ying Ying, whilst Le Le has shown increased sniffing of Ying Ying's scent.

In terms of physical and hormonal changes, the park's veterinary team and giant panda experts from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda in Wolong confirmed that the two giant pandas are entering this year's breeding season, which, Gendron said, is considered an appropriate timing for the experts to prepare for Ying Ying's and Le Le's breeding season this year and temporarily close GPA.

This year, the closure period of GPA where Ying Ying and Le Le reside will be longer than previous years so that expert teams from Ocean Park and Wolong will be able to closely manage and monitor the pair's breeding behaviour from the moment they exhibit early signs of breeding to the time they hit the peak of their breeding cycle.

The gestation period for giant pandas can last from 72 to 324 days and pregnancy confirmation can only be detected by ultrasound scan earliest 14 days before birth.

Ying Ying and Le Le, who experienced their first mating season in 2011, are turning 12 years old this August.

GPA will be reopened to the public after Ying Ying successfully gives birth to a panda cub, or after she is confirmed non-pregnant, according to the park.

The Ocean Park, founded in 1977, is Hong Kong's unique home grown theme park and has gained recognition for its animal husbandry, research and relationship with the community.