

Press Release
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Toronto Zoo Hosts VIP Event to Preview Giant Panda Experience

Exhibit opens to the general public on May 18th



Photo Credit: Toronto Zoo

Toronto, Ontario, Thursday May 16, 2013: The Toronto Zoo Board of Management today held an Official VIP Preview for the new Giant Panda Experience today from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. The event took place at Toronto Zoo, in front of the new giant panda exhibit. Participating in this milestone event were: John Tracogna, CEO Toronto Zoo, Joe Torzsok, Chair, Toronto Zoo Board of Management, Ambassador Zhang Junsai, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, The Honourable Peter Van Loan, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, The Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport and Minister responsible for Pan/Parapan American Games, His Worship, Mayor Rob Ford, City of Toronto, Lisa Lisson, President FedEx Express Canada, James Chiu, President Mandarin Restaurant and Xie Zhong, Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens (CAZG), Vice Secretary General. The opening ceremony included both Canadian and Chinese national anthems sung by Davisville Public School and Yip's Children's Choir (respectively) and Toronto's Royal Canadian Navy Band HMCS York.

"This is one of the most highly anticipated exhibit openings in Toronto Zoo history and we are very proud and honoured to be hosting Giant Pandas Er Shun and Da Mao. With the Giant Panda Experience opening to the public on Saturday May 18th, we are anticipating an overwhelming reaction to this beautiful and unique exhibit" said John Tracogna, Toronto Zoo CEO.

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and a leader in wildlife preservation and environmental protection. More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. "The Giant Panda Experience will be an opportunity to continue with these essential conservation initiatives, as well as an opportunity to educate the public about this important flagship species" said Joe Torzsok, Chair, Toronto Zoo Board of Management.

The giant pandas Er Shun (female: double smoothness) and Da Mao (male: meaning first born) have settled in very well to their new habitat and are eating a lot of bamboo with both of them liking the Aurea species. The keepers weigh them regularly with Er Shun currently weighting 100 kg and Da Mao at 99.8 kg. Both giant pandas are getting more and more curious with their new enrichment items and Da Mao loves to participate in his training sessions with the keepers. Er shun is slowly catching on to her training routine.

The new giant panda experience is situated at the former Amur tiger exhibit in the Zoo's Eurasia section and features two outdoor exhibit areas, which include climbing structures and a pool – as giant pandas like to swim. The interior of the building features two exhibit areas - each with a climbing apparatus and two holding areas for the giant pandas. Also included are; a laboratory and nursery space, changing room, maternity area, and food preparation area. Prior to experiencing the giant panda exhibit, all visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy the Zoo's Giant Panda Interpretive Centre. This newly renovated climate controlled centre will feature many interpretive and interactive elements for visitors to enjoy year round. Interpretive themes will include *Eating Bamboo, Threats to Giant Pandas, and Saving Giant Pandas.*

Giant Panda Fun Facts

1. A giant panda needs to consume a comparatively large amount of food – from 10 to 15 kilograms (22 to 33 pounds) of bamboo each day – to get all of its nutrients. It is thought that the giant panda will only consume the best bamboo and therefore the animal has very selective feeding behaviour, (it will reject normally up to 85% of bamboo offered) and it will need to go through at least 50 kilograms of bamboo per day to find the best bamboo. This can take up to 16 hours of eating per day! The remainder of their time is spent mostly sleeping and resting.
2. Giant pandas do not hibernate because their food source, bamboo, is available year round and their diet does not permit them to build up enough fat to carry them through a hibernation period. However, they will shelter temporarily in hollow trees, rock crevices and caves during the winter.
3. Giant pandas can eat 25 different types of bamboo, but they usually eat only four or five that grow in their home range.
4. Giant panda cubs are born blind and extremely immature state, weighing only 80-200 grams, and are about the size of a stick of butter. They are pink in colour, with short sparse white hair, and are 1/900th the size of their mother, one of the smallest newborn mammals relative to its mother's size.
5. Giant panda females are monoestrous, which means they have only one reproductive cycle per year. This is the only time the female is receptive to the male and it is only for a period of 24 to 72 hours. Calls and scent marking attract males and females to each other.
6. In the past the black and white markings on giant pandas may have helped them to blend into their snowy and rocky surroundings to avoid natural predators.
7. The Chinese call the giant pandas "Big Bear Cat". This is because their eyes have vertical slits like a cat, not round pupils like a bear.
8. Giant pandas can swim and climb trees.
9. The giant panda's teeth are approximately seven times bigger than a human's teeth, which helps the giant panda chew and eat bamboo.

**For more details on Toronto Zoo's giant pandas check out torontozoo.com
or find us on Facebook at facebook.com/torontozoo**

Current Zoo Hours are 9:00am to 7:00pm daily. Last admission is one hour before closing. General admission 13-64 is \$28. Children two and under are free. Children 3 to 12 are \$18. Seniors 65+ are \$23. Parking is \$10. Events and admission prices are subject to change without notice. The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy 401, exit #389 eastbound and westbound. For more information, call 416 392-5929.

The Toronto Zoo is open year round (except Dec. 25).