

NEWS RELEASE



Contact: Kiara Warren
Development and Special Projects Coordinator
Office: (757) 441-2374 ext. 222
Email: kiara.warren@norfolk.gov

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DOUBLE TROUBLE AT THE VIRGINIA ZOO

NORFOLK, Va. – Two new baby red pandas are now, almost, receiving visitors at the Virginia Zoo's Asia – Trail of the Tiger exhibit.

Born Thursday, June 20, to mom Bernadette and father Oscar, the twin male cubs tipped the scales at 95 and 106 grams. Now six weeks later the 400 gram twins weigh about as much as a can of soda. The birth of the cubs was kept under wraps by Zoo staff because panda young are very delicate for the first several weeks of life. For now the cubs continue to grow and thrive, being well cared for by their mother in their exhibit tree houses.

"It is thrilling to have red panda cubs," said Greg Bockheim, the Virginia Zoo's executive director. "As the cubs grow they will become great playmates with each other. All of us are in for a big treat this fall when the cubs should become highly visible in their treetop home. This is a significant birth as red pandas are a threatened species with fewer than 2,500 adults left in the world." Lucky visitors might see mom Bernadette occasionally carrying a cub, in her mouth, throughout the exhibit from one nest site to another – a panda's way of diverting attention away from the cub's scent, and nest site, from potential predators.

Red pandas are tree-dwelling animals native to the eastern Himalayas and southwestern China. They were the first panda discovered, about 40 years prior to giant pandas, although very different both species share the name. Slightly larger than a domestic cat and with markings similar to a raccoon, red pandas have soft, dense reddish-brown and white fur. They feed mainly on bamboo, but also various plant shoots, leaves, fruit and insects. Red pandas are shy and solitary except when mating. Females give birth in the spring and summer, typically to one to three young. Red Pandas remain in their nests for more than 90 days, during which time their mother cares for them.

Zoo Veterinarian, Amanda Guthrie, has been weighing the cubs weekly and Zookeepers are keeping a watchful eye on the cubs' progress. Mom Bernadette has proven to be a good mother but seems particularly bossy towards father panda Oscar.

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RED PANDA CUBS



Zoo Veterinarian, Amanda Guthrie, with one of two 6 week old baby red pandas at the Virginia Zoo. (Virginia Zoo photo by Win Danielson).



Zoo Veterinarian, Amanda Guthrie, listens to the heart of a 6 week old baby panda at the Virginia Zoo. (Virginia Zoo photo by Win Danielson).

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As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9 for children ages 2-11. Children under 2 are admitted free. Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.