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News Release

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Panda partnership goes from strength to strength at signing ceremony

Two leading institutions which have worked closely on attempts to produce Britain's first panda cub have strengthened their relationship at a ceremony in Edinburgh.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and the University of Edinburgh have signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding to encourage further collaboration on a range of research projects and RZSS activities.

The agreement will see specialists across the humanities and sciences build on their work in the giant panda project by participating in public events and sharing scientific facilities.

Possible initiatives include the development of a joint discovery centre, as well as research on sustainability, climate change and animal conservation and breeding. The two bodies will also explore the possibility of doing more to protect and promote Scotland's wildlife.

Experts from the two historic institutions have already been working closely together.

Endocrinologists at the Queen's Medical Research Institute (QMRI) at the University of Edinburgh, have been analysing daily urine samples taken from Tian Tian.

Together, Society and University experts have been able to confirm key timelines in the female giant panda's breeding window and pregnancy by extracting complex scientific data that shows protein levels and hormone crossovers and dips at various key stages.

The compilation and study of the data sourced has happily allowed scientists at both organisations to confirm Tian Tian is likely pregnant and will carry to full term.

As well as sharing equipment and expertise on difficult cases and testing services, the Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Eddie Clutton, was responsible for anaesthetising Tian Tian during the artificial insemination procedure.

Other ongoing collaborations include the Living Links to Human Evolution Research Centre on site at Edinburgh Zoo. Opened in 2008, Living Links is a field station and research centre

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of the University of St Andrews, established in partnership with RZSS. It has large outside and inside enclosures in which capuchin monkeys and squirrel monkeys live together.

These animals form mixed-species groups in the wild. Living Links is designed to support studies by scientists at the Universities of St Andrews, Stirling, Edinburgh and Abertay, who together form the Scottish Primate Research Group (SPRG). Members of SPRG study primate behaviour at many field-sites in the wild, as well as in captivity.

The memorandum was signed by Jeremy Peat, RZSS Chair, and Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, in the library of Edinburgh Zoo's Mansion House.

Jeremy Peat, Chair of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, said: "There has been a longstanding association between RZSS and the University of Edinburgh, from the foundation of the Society and Edinburgh Zoo in the early 20th Century, to the current day.

"The strongest associations have been between zoologists and veterinary scientists, and for many years the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh provided clinical service to Edinburgh Zoo.

"Since then there has been a constant informal exchange between the two bodies, with representation in governance, shared enterprises and intellectual stimulation. It is now agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding will provide a framework for further collaborations."

Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, said: "I am delighted that we are able to come together and formalise joint objectives and shared goals. We have a strong history of collaboration and it is very satisfying to recognise this publically and formally."

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