

Giant pandas in Hong Kong zoo finally mate after nine years of trying, bringing hope to a threatened species

These amorous pandas are a shining example of perseverance.

We have a new entry in the glimmers-of-hope-in-the-world category. Please give a hand to Ying Ying and Le Le, two giant pandas at the Ocean Park theme park in Hong Kong. The panda pair successfully hooked up for the first time in nine years of mating attempts.

Ocean Park, which is currently closed due to coronavirus concerns, announced the happy coupling on social media on Monday.



The two bears had been trying to mate naturally since 2011. It's not easy. Pandas International, a nonprofit dedicated to panda conservation, says the rate is "quite low" for natural breeding of the animals in captivity. "A female Panda has a single estrous cycle once a year, in the spring, for 2 to 7 of those days, and she's only actually fertile for 24 to 36 hours," said Pandas International.

Giant pandas are categorized as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Captive breeding programs have focused on artificial insemination as a way to boost panda numbers.

Now, we wait. "The park's veterinary and animal care teams have been closely monitoring the giant pandas' body conditions and behavioral changes, hoping to bring wonderful pregnancy news to you all," Ocean Park said on Facebook.

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