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The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland has been criticised for once again resorting to artificial insemination in a bid to get their female Giant Panda, Tian Tian, pregnant.

In an e-mail letter to Chief Executive Professor Chris West, John Robins of Animal Concern accuses Edinburgh Zoo of risking the lives of Giant Pandas Tian Tian and Yang Guang by subjecting them to general anaesthesia to carry out the artificial insemination procedure. Mr. Robins also questions the conservation value of breeding from animals which appear to be incapable of breeding on their own and suggested the zoo seek advice from local sheep farmers instead of international scientific experts.

John Robins states; "Any sheep farmer would have told the zoo not to breed from poor breeding stock. If the idea is to return Giant Pandas to the wild is the zoo going to create a new breed line of Pandas which need to be followed around in the Chinese forests by a team of international scientists armed with anaesthetic darts and buckets of frozen sperm? Instead of subjecting Tian Tian and Yang Guang to these invasive procedures every year Edinburgh Zoo should stop the breeding programme and use the Pandas to educate visitors to the reality of extinction. It is too late for the Giant Panda but other animals can be saved if we act now to save their wild habitat."

Below is a copy of the letter to the Chief Executive of The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland:

Professor Chris West,
Chief Executive,
The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland,
Edinburgh Zoo,
134 Corstorphine Road,
Edinburgh EH12 6TS

Dear Professor West,

I have just learned that having yet again milked Tian Tian and Yang Guang for all the panda porn publicity you could get you have again resorted to using artificial insemination in an attempt to get Tian Tian pregnant.

Apart from the risk of death involved in anaesthetising both animals to obtain and implant the semen you are surely making an extraordinarily basic mistake in trying to breed from animals which quite frankly seem incapable of breeding on their own.

Instead of spending money bringing in international experts the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland should have a chat with any sheep farmer within a ten mile radius of Ingliston. I'm sure they would advise you that you are spending \$1,000,000 a year renting very poor breeding stock and it is not advisable to breed from them. Unless of course your aim is to create a new line of Giant Pandas which can be returned to the wild accompanied by a team of German zoologists armed with anaesthetic darts and a freezer full of panda sperm to help maintain the wild population?

I urge you to have a total rethink on breeding Giant Pandas. Even if you are successful the cubs become the property of the Chinese Government and will end up being leased for large sums of money as paying punter pullers to other international zoos.

Instead use these animals to explain to the public that they are looking at a species which is going to die out and that, although it is too late for the Giant Panda, there are other species which could be saved if we act now to save their habitat from destruction.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Animal Concern