

EVIDENCE OF THE MAIN IDEA

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Excerpt by Ben Nuckols, Associated Press (January 05, 2016)
Shared on www.TweenTribune.com

Panda cub is ready for public debut

If the youngest giant panda cub at the National Zoo in Washington is stressed out about appearing in front of crowds for the first time, he isn't showing it.

Keepers were expecting Bei Bei (pronounced BAY BAY) to squawk and squirm during an audience with a small news media contingent Dec. 14. Instead, under bright television lights with cameras clicking, he quickly fell asleep on an examination table. He left a small puddle of drool on the tablecloth.

Panda biologist Laurie Thompson explained that before he went in front of the cameras, Bei Bei was playing with a piece of bamboo. And he was trying to walk. Just like a newborn human, he tires easily.

"I'm very proud of him," Thompson said. "Obviously, he wasn't too bothered by all the people here. This is just the beginning for him as far as people go."

Bei Bei is ready for his close-up. The cub will make a few appearances before selected audiences ahead of his public debut on Jan. 16. That's when the panda house will reopen. It's also around the time Bei Bei will be sure enough on his feet that he'll get to venture into the outdoor panda habitat for the first time.