

Japan to get pair of giant pandas from China for breeding program

BEIJING (AP) Japan will get a pair of giant pandas for a 10-year breeding program in exchange for unspecified donations to protect China's shrinking population of wild pandas, according to official reports.

A pair of two-year-old pandas are headed for Adventure World in Wakayama Prefecture, the Xinhua News Agency reported Monday.

The male, born in Beijing zoo, is named Rong Ming, and the female, from the Chengdu zoo in southwest China, is Rong Bang.

They will take part in a

joint program to study panda food substitutes, breeding methods, and prevention and cure of diseases. Each year two Chinese panda specialists will visit Japan for a year of research, the report said.

At the end of the 10-year program, the pandas will return to China, along with any cubs they produce.

In exchange for the long-term loan, Adventure World is making donations to China's panda protection and breeding programs, but the report did not specify the amount of the donations.

China has come under in-

ternational criticism for "renting" out its pandas, which are endangered. They are found only in southwestern China, and risk becoming extinct because of dwindling food supplies, human encroachment and poaching.

Rather than focusing on protecting the pandas' natural environment, China's tactic is to try to increase their numbers in zoos through artificial insemination and other methods.

Xinhua said the goal of the program is to eventually release the zoo-bred pandas into the wild.

JAPAN TIMES 7/9/94