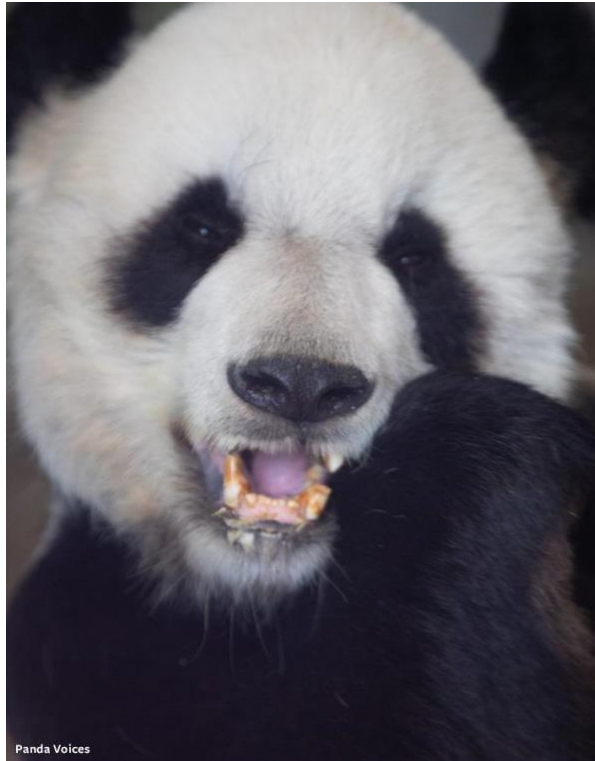


LeLe the Giant Panda Dies of Neglect After Collapse at Memphis Zoo Shortly Before Return to China

From [IDA In Defense of Animals](#)

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On December 21st, we were thrilled by the news that the Memphis Zoo's giant pandas YaYa and LeLe would finally be returned to China this spring, where they would at long last get the quality care they needed. Unfortunately, in a devastating turn of events, LeLe passed away. Now, we're calling for immediate steps to be taken to honor LeLe and ensure this zoo never exhibits pandas again.

Just six weeks ago, we were [celebrating the news](#) that LeLe and YaYa would be returned to their homeland of China once their loan contract ends on April 7, 2023, following two years of campaigning in partnership with Panda Voices on their behalf. It's incredibly tragic that after 20 years of suffering, LeLe died prematurely of neglect and inadequate care when he was so close to going home. His health was obviously worsening, yet no recommended changes were made to help him or YaYa. Zoo captivity and prolonged, inadequate care destroyed this beautiful individual. He was only 24 years old, yet pandas can live well over 30 years. His own mother XinXing passed away at the age of 38 in China in 2020.

On February 3, Memphis Zoo announced that LeLe had passed away on February 1. We were aghast with their statements during the press conference that took place. When asked about LeLe's recent health, they shockingly said, *"We saw no indication that would lead us to believe there is anything wrong with LeLe."* Only the most unobservant or untruthful could make this claim with a straight face. When journalists asked about the concerns raised by In Defense of Animals and Panda Voices about LeLe's recent lack of appetite, weakness, and his filmed collapse, they had the nerve to claim that LeLe *"was just*

being silly,” “he acts dramatically,” and “he was simply lying down on that video” A few days later, according to them, LeLe “suddenly” died (as if his frightening collapse didn’t indicate anything wrong!).



However, prior to LeLe’s death, both he and 22-year-old YaYa were observed to be visibly distressed, malnourished, and underweight, spending their days pacing or sleeping, and clearly bored in their dirty, small enclosure. YaYa has a chronic skin condition, and LeLe had significant teeth issues resulting in broken molars. We raised our concerns and tried several times to arrange meetings with the zoo to discuss the situation and have a transparent dialogue, but were ignored.

We and Panda Voices also worked to expose the pandas' suffering and alerted the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens (CAZG) to the poor quality of food and care provided to the pandas. The Chinese zoo organization [released a statement](#) on March 10, 2022, acknowledging both pandas were underweight and suggested Memphis Zoo improve their diets by increasing food variety and protein sources to improve nutrition and help them gain weight. However, there is no evidence that Memphis Zoo implemented CAZG’s suggestions to improve the pandas’ diet.

LeLe started showing increased signs of physical deterioration in mid-January. He had very little interest in bamboo, was visibly weak, and appeared emaciated. He seemed to be also having severe digestive problems. Panda monitors watching the zoo’s panda cam noted LeLe’s health issues escalating over several days. The most worrying moment happened on January 25 and was recorded by the panda monitors. LeLe tried to eat a bamboo stalk, suddenly collapsed on the ground, and didn't get up for several hours. He barely ate anything that day, which is another significant concern since giant pandas need to eat for around 10 to 16 hours daily.

In the last weeks before LeLe’s passing, Panda Voices posted extensively about its observations of his declining health. The group prepared material with supporting evidence to be sent to the Chinese authorities asking them to push the zoo to improve the pandas’ diet so that they are fit to fly back to China

and for the pandas to be sent back immediately. We deployed a [media release](#) on January 31 alerting the media about our concerns regarding LeLe's health.

Memphis Zoo utterly failed LeLe and has clearly demonstrated its profound inability to properly care for pandas, [not to mention elephants](#). We are urging Memphis Zoo to send YaYa back to China immediately before her health worsens. We have also renewed our call on the zoo to stop exhibiting pandas and are calling on Chinese authorities to stop sending pandas to Memphis Zoo in the future. Additionally, we want the zoo to make LeLe's medical records public and give the public access to the panda cam within the indoor room of the panda enclosure, as only the exhibit area is visible on the cam. For three days before learning of his death, LeLe was not seen on the panda cam in the exhibit, leaving advocates to grow increasingly concerned.



Memphis Zoo failed LeLe, and YaYa should not be forced to suffer the same fate. She needs to be healthy, strong, and fit to endure the long trip to China. As for beloved LeLe, his death will not be in vain as we seek justice for him and share his story widely to expose Memphis Zoo's failure, as well as the plight of so many animals forced to suffer by zoos for profit.