

Old-growth forests are what giant pandas need

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The results of a study recently published in the journal *Biology Letters* indicate that giant pandas need old-growth forests as much as bamboo forests. This work, which was completed through the collaborative efforts of scientists from the Chinese Academy of Science, San Diego Zoo Global, China West Normal University, China Wildlife Conservation Association and the Sichuan Forestry Department, could assist conservationists in creating strategic plans that help conserve this critically endangered bear species.

"In this study we show that pandas are associated with old-growth forests more than with any ecological variable other than bamboo," said, Ron Swaisgood, Ph.D., one of the authors of the work and a panda researcher with the San Diego Zoo. "This finding indicates that in order to conserve this species, we need to conserve both bamboo and old-growth forests."

The study, which was conducted from 1999 through 2003, includes data collected from the panda's range in the Sichuan province of China. A key element to the success of this endeavor was the scale of the study, which contributed important information.

"But maps and measures of habitat suitability are only as good as the underlying biological assumptions, which are sometimes influenced by the scale over which data are obtained, " states the study. "Modellers of panda habitat have not ignored the available ecological data but have been forced to rely on data collected over limited temporal and spatial scales."

Giant pandas are unique among bear species for their reliance on an almost completely herbivorous diet that consists largely of bamboo. This dependence on a bamboo diet has indicated the importance of conserving [bamboo](#) forests in order to conserve giant [pandas](#). Information about the panda's additional dependence on old-growth forests is expected to affect conservation efforts for this species in the future.

Provided by Zoological Society of San Diego

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