

Panda preferences influence trees used for scent marking

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As solitary animals, giant pandas have developed a number of ways to communicate those times when they are ready to come into close contact. One means of this communication occurs through scent marking. A recent study by San Diego Zoo Global researchers, collaborating with researchers at the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Science, indicates that pandas make clear and specific choices about what trees are used for scent marking.

"Variables affecting the selection of scent-marking sites included bark roughness, presence of moss on the tree trunk, tree diameter and distance to the trail," said Ron Swaisgood, Ph.D., co-head of [San Diego Zoo](#) Global's [Giant Panda](#) Conservation Unit. "These choices have clear effects on the scent signal, making it last longer, be detected from further away, or otherwise enhance its communication efficiency. We are not surprised that pandas are efficient with their use of chemo-signals, as mounting evidence suggests that many aspects of giant panda life history are constrained by their energetically poor diet."

This study, which was recently published in *Animal Behavior*, confirms that old-growth forest and other factors like tree type are important for maintaining habitat that will support giant panda conservation.

Provided by Zoological Society of San Diego

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