Pandas aren't as picky as we thought: Researchers find endangered animal is far more adaptable (as long as they've got bamboo)

Had been believed animals needed pristine forest with a gentle slope

Team now say animals simply want to be where the best bamboo is

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Pandas are not quite as picky as experts thought. Researchers in Michigan say that in fact, animals are far more resilient in the areas they can live in. The new finding could dramatically improve the animals chances in the wild - where the 1,600 remaining wild giant pandas in the 21,300 square kilometers to which the animals have been relegated.

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It has been thought pandas demanded a forest with fairly gentle slope to make it easier to wander around in while seeking bamboo, at a certain elevation in original, old forest, an abundance of bamboo, and plenty of distance from people.

These recommendations, Hull said, come from poor research simply because pandas are difficult animals to study.

Pandas are difficult to observe and follow in the wild, we're always 10 steps behind them,' Hulls said.

'We don't know why they're there -- or where they were before and after. There's a lot of guesswork.'

Vanessa and her colleagues drew up analysis of all the research projects and sought to separate studies that focus on where pandas live from studies that examine what kind of choices pandas make when multiple types of habitat are available.

They discovered that pandas may not be as picky as thought.

The research shows, for instance, that pandas are willing to live in secondary forests -- forests that have been logged and have regrown.

They also don't seem as selective about slope, and are willing to climb depending on which of the many varieties of bamboo is growing, or what type of forest it was in. Same for elevation, and the amount of sunshine that hits a piece of panda home.

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They also found that there is a complex relationship between trees and bamboo.

'If it's exciting to see the flexibility pandas have, or at least see that pandas are choosing areas I didn't think could support them', Hull said.

'It gives you hope.

'They've survived throughout many challenges over so many millions of years, it would be sad to think humans came along and threw it all away.

'This also suggests we should stay on board and try to make things better for them.'

The paper, 'A synthesis of giant panda habitat selection,' is published in Ursus, the journal of the International Association for Bear Research and Management.

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