Spraying urine and flehmen －function of scent-related behaviors in tapirs －

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Tapirs are basically solitary. But it is necessary for them to inform others about themselves / get information about other individuals in order to breed and compete with others. It is known that tapirs spray urine, and show flehmen response. But little is known about the function of these scent informing / receiving behaviors. The objective of this study is: To clarify the situation where tapirs receive scent / inform via scent, and how these behaviors work in construction of relationship between tapir individuals. Both captive and wild tapirs were observed in this study.

"Spraying urine" and "flehmen" were observed in three lowland tapirs of Kyoto City Zoo, which were a pair of adult (male and female), and a sub-adult male. An adult female showed flehmen more frequently against the scent of the adult male than the sub-adult male. Moreover, adult male sprayed urine more frequently than sub-adult, and female sprayed more frequently when she were with adult male than sub-adult. The results suggest that the female tapir receive scent information selectively and that the adult male and female exchange information via scent frequently.

Infrared sensor cameras were set around the salt licks in Belum Temengor Rainforest Complex, Perak, Malaysia. Observing collected video shots, the behavior of wild Malayan tapirs was recorded. At one of the salt lick, four individuals were distinguished. They had never used salt lick when the other individual used there, except one breeding pair. Collecting more data may lead to suggest that tapirs would prevent encounter with other individuals during using salt lick by exchanging scent information.