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## Love at First Sniff

By [JOHN SCHWARTZ](#)

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For Belding's ground squirrels, it's a smell world, after all. New research reveals at least five sources of body scent that the squirrels, *Spermophilus beldingi*, use as a symphony of smell to identify one another.



Jill M. Mateo/University of Chicago

Individual identification is important, said Jill M. Mateo, an assistant professor in the department of comparative human development at the University of Chicago and the author of the study.

The squirrels can live a decade or more and dwell in high density. They develop distinctive personalities, laid back or cantankerous, so "it pays to be able to know

who's who," Dr. Mateo said. Other scientists have studied the many ways social animals identify one another, and research by Robert E. Johnston of Cornell has yielded similar results with hamsters.

Dr. Mateo measured familiarity from the amount of interest squirrels showed in the scents; new smells got

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more attention than old. She previously showed that squirrels recognize kin, but the new work suggests that they can "tell the difference between Sue and Mary." Each source - glands next to the mouth, back, feet, anus and above the eyes - has a different smell, she said, but each is tied to the individual. "Five different odors say, 'Sue, Sue, Sue, Sue, Sue, Sue,'" she said.

"Together, these results indicate a rich olfactory milieu mediating the social lives of *S. beldingi*," she wrote in the current edition of *Animal Behavior*.

JOHN SCHWARTZ

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