Caching by urban squirrels as a link between research and education

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METHODS: OUTDOOR FUN WITH NUTS AND SQUIRRELS

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Figure 1. Nylon spools of threat are attached to hazelnuts with epoxy, and three spools (500 m each) are placed inside each plastic canister.

Figure 2. Students buried the canisters into the ground. Squirrels, upon finding the nuts, may collect, eat or hide them away. As the squirrel moves the nut, the spool remains anchored in the container, and the thread plays out.

Figure 3. In 8 trials of this exercise, students tracked and monitored the caching behavior of squirrels by following the threads from the release point to where the squirrels either consumed (shell fragments) or buried the nuts.

RESULTS

Cached and eaten hazelnuts after 5 d

Figure 5. Fate of hazelnuts (cached or eaten) after 5 days of release. Higher proportion of hazelnuts were cached close to the release point, and were eaten as opposed to lower proportion of hazelnuts cached and eaten at longer distances.

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of seeds (± 5D) dispersed by squirrels at different mid-range distances (m) from the release point. The number of seeds buried decreased with distance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance (mid-range in m)</th>
<th>Frequency Seeds Dispersed</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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LITERATURE CITED


CONTACT INFORMATION

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