

23 **Abstract:**

24 Squirrels of temperate zones commonly store nuts or seeds under leaf litter, in hollow logs
25 or even in holes in the ground; however, in humid rainforests, it is an evolutionary
26 challenge for squirrels to hang elliptical or oblate nuts securely on trees to minimize
27 germination or fungal infection. Here, we report a unique behaviour used by two species of
28 small flying squirrels (*Hylopetes phayrei electilis* (G. M. Allen, 1925) and *Hylopetes*
29 *alboniger* (Hodgson, 1870)) to cache nuts on Hainan Island. Squirrels intentionally carved
30 grooves encircling ellipsoid nuts or distributed on the bottom of oblate nuts and used these
31 grooves to fix nuts tightly between small twigs 0.1-0.6 cm in diameter and connected at
32 angles of 25-40°. The resulting structures were similar to the mortise-tenon joint of ancient
33 Chinese architecture. Cache sites were on small plants located 10-25 m away from the
34 closest potentially nut-producing tree, a behaviour that likely deters discovery and
35 consumption of the nuts by other animals. Their ability to shape individual nuts to store
36 them more securely suggests it is a smart behavior, which is likely formed by the adaption
37 to life in humid tropical rainforests to guarantee food supply and impacts the distribution of
38 tree species.

39

40 **Key words:** animal behavior, environmental adaption, *Hylopetes phayrei electilis*,
41 *Hylopetes alboniger*, mortise-tenon structure, nut cache, squirrel, tropical rainforest.

42

43

44 **Introduction**

45 Storing food is a common species-typical behaviour of squirrels and other rodents to
46 prepare for seasons when nuts or seeds are in short supply (Andersson and Krebs, 1978;
47 Steele et al., 2006). Nuts, in particular, are picked up from trees and then cached in various
48 places. For example, many temperate-zone squirrels hoard nuts under leaf litter, or in holes
49 in trees, logs or the ground (Cheng et al., 2005; Hadj-chikh et al., 1996). In subtropical
50 zones, however, nuts may be stored by hanging them on tree branches, a behaviour thought
51 to minimize germination or fungal infection in humid environments (Lichti et al., 2017;
52 Xiao et al., 2013). These nuts are in clusters and are easily to be hanged on the branches
53 directly, without needs to use tools to process nuts before being stored.

54 However, most nuts in tropical forests are single fruits with shapes that are mostly
55 elliptical or oblate, something that makes them difficult to hang on trees. Solving this
56 problem presents an evolutionary challenge to squirrels in such environments. The tool-use
57 behaviors have been recorded for some animals in nature, such as chimpanzees, monkeys
58 and corvids (Sanz et al., 2013). Squirrels also have smart decision-making behavior (Hadj-
59 chikh et al., 1996; Hunt et al., 2021). Thus, we ask whether these nuts were processed by
60 the squirrels' tool using or some special behaviors to make them being securely fixed on
61 the twigs.

62 In this paper, we show that a subspecies of the Indochinese Flying Squirrel, *Hylopetes*
63 *phayrei electilis* (G. M. Allen, 1925) and another species of the Flying Squirrel, *H.*
64 *alboniger* (Hodgson, 1870) that co-occur in Hainan Island cache nuts by intentionally
65 carving behavior before suspending them between the twigs of small plants. Both the two

66 squirrel species are widespread in Southeast Asia (Duckworth et al., 2016; Tizard, 2016),
67 but there is little published information about their habits and none from Hainan Province
68 in China. This special behavior on nuts storage does not occur elsewhere in these two
69 squirrels' range and has not been reported that squirrels could carve the nuts intentionally
70 to improve the success rate of storage. Thus, we set out to describe a unique behaviour
71 through which they prepare and hang single ellipsoid or oblate nuts to solve the problem of
72 providing safe storage in tropical rainforests. The sites where and the behavior how the
73 nuts were stored and correlated squirrels' activities were focused.

74

75 **Results and Discussion**

76 A total of 151 cached nuts were found suspended on an overall total of more than 55 tree
77 or shrub species distributed across 28 plant families in censuses of approximately 5.5 ha of
78 forest (**Supplementary Figure 1, Supplementary Data file 1**). Examples of nut locations
79 and shaped nuts are shown in **Figures 1-2**. Most discovered nuts were fixed on a variety of
80 small saplings and shrubs between plant twigs connected at angles of 25-40° (**Figure 3**).
81 This range of angles accommodates the nut sizes of *Cyclobalanopsis edithiae* and *C.*
82 *patelliformis* (2.4 cm (width) × 4.6 cm (length) and 2.4 cm (width) × 2.0 cm (height),
83 respectively), which accounted for 96.7% of the nuts that we found cached (*C. edithiae*
84 (40.4%), *C. patelliformis* (56.3%)). A few other nuts of *Lithocarpus fenzelianus* A. Camus
85 and *C. fleuryi* (Hickel & A. Camus) Chun ex Q. F. Zheng were also found suspended on
86 plants. Nuts of the two predominant species were disproportionately stored on small plants
87 with diameters at breast height (DBH) of 0.4-1.6 cm (**Supplementary Figure 2**) and twig

88 diameters of 0.10-0.60 cm (**Figures 4a, c**). The diameters of the two twigs used for the
89 storage structure were significantly correlated for *C. patelliformis* nuts but not for *C.*
90 *edithiae* ($P < 0.001$, **Figures 4b, d**). For nuts of *C. edithiae*, plant twig diameter was
91 significantly correlated with the nut groove width, and generally varied from 0.20 cm to
92 0.60 cm ($P < 0.001$, **Figure 5**). The first to third branches at a plant height of 1.50-2.50 m
93 comprised 45.9% of *C. edithiae* and 43.5% of *C. patelliformis* storage sites we discovered
94 (**Supplementary Figure 3**).

95 We used the footage from our infrared cameras to identify the nocturnal flying
96 squirrels, *Hylopetes phayrei electilis* and *H. alboniger*, as being actively associated with
97 these nuts (**Supplementary Media files 1-5**). Both *H. phayrei electilis* and *H. alboniger*
98 are small-bodied flying squirrels found in tropical forests from Myanmar, south to
99 northwestern Vietnam and east into the Guizhou, Guangxi and Fujian Provinces
100 of southern China. These two species co-occur in the tropical mountain rainforests in the
101 Hainan, Province of China (Li et al., 2012).

102 Squirrels of both species apparently carve spiral zigzag surface grooves that encircle
103 the midsection of the ellipsoid nuts of *C. edithiae* (**Figures 1a-f**) with one or occasionally
104 two grooves (**Figures 2a-c**). The two non-connected or spiral grooves appear to be useful
105 for adjusting the storage of nuts to the specific orientation of the twigs. In contrast, up to
106 20 grooves are carved on the bottom of the oblate nuts of *C. patelliformis* (**Figures 1g-i**),
107 commonly with 0-8 shallow scattered grooves (**Supplementary Figure 4a**), some even
108 have 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 symmetric grooves (**Figures 2d-i**). These oblate nuts stored on living
109 trees and shrubs have significantly more carved shallow scattered grooves than those

110 stored on dead trees and lianas (5.1 ± 5.0 vs. 2.8 ± 4.0 , $t=2.1591$, $df=46.402$, $P=0.036$). The
111 bark of dead trees and lianas is coarser than that of living trees, and thus dead stems may
112 require fewer grooves to hold the nuts securely. We also note that that the grooves on the
113 ellipsoid nuts of *C. edithiae* are deeper (more than 0.5 mm) than on the oblate nuts of *C.*
114 *patelliformis* (less than 0.45 mm, **Supplementary Figure 4b**), but grooves of either depth
115 do not damage the endosperm of nuts, thus likely reducing potential impacts of fungi
116 during the storage period.

117 Surface preparations by the squirrels allow the nuts to be “pressure fitted” between
118 the two plant twigs in a way similar to the mortise-tenon structure in ancient Chinese
119 architecture (Qiao et al., 2021) (**Figure 2**). The carved nuts are inlaid between plant twigs
120 (0.10-0.60 cm in diameter) intersecting at specific angles (25-40°) on various understory
121 plants (**Figure 3**), including small trees and shrubs, sometimes lianas, bamboos or dead
122 trees, and even occasionally big petioles of palms or trees (**Figures 1j-n, Supplementary**
123 **Table 2**). Once fixed in this manner nuts are resistant to being blown off by strong wind or
124 shaking that we administered (**Supplementary Media files 6-11**).

125 We found that nuts produced by large trees of the two *Cyclobalanopsis* species are
126 stored on much smaller understory plants by these flying squirrels. The distance between
127 nut producing trees and storage sites varied from 10 to 25 m (**Supplementary Figure 5**),
128 distances larger than the average canopy width of large trees that we have observed in the
129 Jianfengling forest. This likely reduces discovery by other animals searching for
130 aboveground nuts below the parent trees (Cao et al., 2011), although it seems that some
131 nuts may be still eaten by mice. Based on our assessments, only 63.6% nuts stored on

132 understory plants were fresh at the time of survey, meaning that they can persist in these
133 storage sites for lengthy periods. Over the 44 days between the first and second surveys,
134 19.7% of the stored nuts had disappeared, and 15.0% of the nuts discovered during the
135 second survey were new. Over the 61 days between the second and third surveys, 43.7% of
136 the stored nuts had disappeared, and 20.6% of the nuts discovered were new. Thus, in a
137 general sense, the number of nuts being stored seems to decrease gradually from January to
138 May after the fruiting season.

139 Seedlings that result from any dropped, fallen or forgotten nuts (**Supplementary**
140 **Figure 6**) may germinate at some distance from their parents. In this way, seed dispersal
141 by these squirrels may decrease competition between seedlings and parent trees and thus
142 increase seedling survival rates that could, in turn decrease the negative density
143 dependence of conspecific trees as consistent with recently published arguments (Detto et
144 al., 2019). Unfortunately, we are presently unable to estimate what proportion of the
145 disappearance results from use by squirrels, although our video footage establishes that
146 some nuts are indeed removed (**Supplementary Media files 1-5**). Nonetheless, some
147 proportion of nuts likely falls and may germinate near the storage site, as is common for
148 seeds and nuts cached by squirrels, especially in hardwood forests (Steele and Yi, 2020).
149 Furthermore, although the importance of large DBH trees has been emphasized for the
150 maintenance of forest ecosystem productivity (Lutz et al., 2018), from a broader
151 perspective, small understory plants may help sustain the diversity and complexity of
152 forest structure in the long run through plant-animal interaction processes like those
153 described here.

154 The precipitation and the humidity of the environments may be the motivation to
155 drive squirrels to fix the nuts above the ground. In the temperate-zone, the annual
156 precipitation is usually less than 1000 mm and the coniferous trees are dominant, which
157 produce relatively dry fallen needles. The nuts could be safely stored under leaf litter or on
158 the ground without special processing (Hadj-chikh et al., 1996). In the studied sites in the
159 tropical forests in Jianfengling, Hainan Island, the annual precipitation varies from 1300-
160 3700 mm (Xu et al., 2015). The nuts may germinate or been infected by fungi in the humid
161 environments, especially in the rainy season. Hence, it is much better for the squirrels to
162 store nuts above the ground, such as on the understory twigs.

163 For the special nuts carving behavior, we guess it may be originated from an
164 inadvertent carving attempt long long ago and squirrels learned that the carved grooves
165 help improve the nut fixation between the twigs. This learning ability is widely reported in
166 animals, e.g., wild parrots have strong abilities to use and manufacture tools, and imitate
167 (Shaw, 2021). Gradually, the special nuts carving behaviour became a common practice
168 for these two squirrels, although this speculation needs more evidences like animal cranial
169 zootomy or behaviour training experiments in the future.

170 In summary, individuals of *H. phayrei electilis* and *H. alboniger*, among the nine
171 species of squirrels known from tropical forests of Hainan (**Supplementary Table 3**),
172 store nuts of different shapes and sizes securely on a variety of plant twigs at some distance
173 from the plants that produced them. Clearly, squirrels have evolved the ability to prepare
174 the nuts for such storage by carving grooves in their surfaces to create a “mortise-tenon”
175 connection between nuts and plant twigs selected for particular characteristics. This leads

176 to the inference that squirrel can reason about how to effectively reshape the nuts for
177 storage. The symmetric groove structure on oblate nuts carved by individuals of *H. phayrei*
178 *electilis* and *H. alboniger* support a complex and effective strategy for fixing nuts.

179 Taken together, these observations indicate that these two flying squirrels have
180 adapted to the particular humid tropical rainforest circumstances and developed smart
181 behavior flexibly to solve nut-storage problems. We suggest that this is a smart behavior
182 that has evolved through plant-animal-environment interactions that provide long-term
183 adaption to secure food, given the high precipitation environment and the seasonal
184 production of nuts before the coldest month in these rainforests. The caching behavior may
185 further affect dispersal and the functional traits of nuts (Chang and Zhang, 2014; Xiao et
186 al., 2004) in a way that alters the spatial and temporal distribution pattern of the local plant
187 community in the long-run. These possibilities deserve more attention in the future
188 (Goheen and Swihart, 2003; Rong et al., 2013).

189

190 **Materials and Methods**

191 **Study site**

192 This study was conducted in the Jianfengling region of Hainan Tropical Rainforest
193 National Park in Hainan Province, China (108°46'-109°45'E). The area has a seasonal
194 tropical monsoon climate with a rainy season from June to October and a dry season from
195 November through May of the next year. The mean annual temperature is 19.7°C and the
196 annual average precipitation is 2684 mm. This is the second rainiest area on Hainan Island,
197 with an average annual relative humidity over > 88%. The forests include 992 free-

198 standing tree and shrub species, and are dominated by trees of Fagaceae, Lauraceae and
199 Moraceae (Xu et al., 2012). *Castanopsis*, *Lithocarpus* and *Cyclobalanopsis* are three main
200 genera of Fagaceae, which reproduce nuts which are used as food by mammals. Cupules of
201 *Castanopsis* are solitary on rachis, completely or partially enclosing the nut, cupules of
202 *Lithocarpus* are grouped together in cymes on rachis, completely or partly enclosing the
203 nut, while cupules of *Cyclobalanopsis* are solitary, and do not enclose the nuts. The
204 enclosed nuts are not easy for squirrels to deal with. Thus, *Cyclobalanopsis* nuts are highly
205 preferred as food by squirrels or other animals. *Cyclobalanopsis edithiae* (Skan) Schottky
206 and *Cyclobalanopsis patelliformis* (Chun) Y. C. Hsu et H. W. Jen are the two most
207 abundant species that have naked nuts in the mountain forests of Jianfengling (Xu et al.,
208 2015) (**Supplementary Table 1**). Both are in fruit from October to December, just before
209 the coldest month (January) in Hainan.

210

211 **Field investigation**

212 This work was prompted by inadvertent discovery of *Cyclobalanopsis* nuts with strange
213 surface grooves tucked into the Y-shaped crotches of twigs on understory plants (**Figure**
214 **1**). Most of the regular grooves showed signs of having been chewed by some animal(s)
215 (**Figure 2**), perhaps in order to increase the friction between nuts and plant twigs so as to
216 fix the nuts securely in place. Thus, we conducted a systematic field investigation from
217 January to May 2022 to discover the animal(s) involved and to study the nut caching
218 behavior in more detail.

219 We first made a systematic search of a ca. 5.5 ha forest area for grooved nuts
220 suspended in vegetation to establish the relationship of this phenomenon to various plant
221 types. The species identity, diameter at breast height (DBH), geographical position, and
222 elevation of plants found with chewed nuts were recorded. We also measured the diameter
223 and angles of the two twigs where the nuts were fixed. Local stand canopy closure was
224 estimated visually and the dominant trees within a ca. 20 m radius of the stored nuts were
225 recorded. Finally, we measured the distance between the storage site and the nearest tree
226 where the nuts could have been produced. For the suspended nuts themselves, we
227 determined the species, weight, diameter and height on each plant. The number, depth and
228 position of the surface grooves were also noted. Because precise measurement was
229 impossible, depth of the carved grooves was measured as a categorical variable classified
230 in the following three groups: shallow (ca. 0-0.15 mm), medium (ca. 0.15-0.30 mm) and
231 deep (ca. 0.30-0.45 mm). We also recorded whether each nut was fresh, eaten by insects or
232 infected by fungi; fresh nuts are green but become wrinkled and black with age. All
233 discovered nuts were photographed.

234 The first search for cached nuts was carried out on January 15, 2022. We re-surveyed
235 the site 44 days later on February 28 to learn whether the nuts recorded previously were
236 still where we initially found them, and to find any new nuts that had been stored in the
237 area. A third survey was made 61 days later on April 30.

238 Because we initially knew neither the identity of animals that stored the nuts nor how
239 nuts were stored and retrieved, we set up 32 motion-activated infrared cameras (22
240 WildINSights 20MP 1080P HD Trail Cameras and 10 WildINSights 5MP 960P HD Trail

241 Color Cameras) to monitor animal activities related to storage or consumption of the nuts.
242 These cameras were positioned to view typical nuts that we found and their surroundings.
243 Animals filmed as being associated with the nuts were subsequently identified to species
244 by experts using the resulting pictures and videos.

245

246 **Statistical analyses**

247 Histograms were drawn to describe variation in the sizes and location of storage plants and
248 nuts. Standard *t*-tests were used to assess the significance of differences between paired
249 sets of variables and linear regression was used to assess relationships between sizes of the
250 two twigs that constituted the nut storage site.

251

252 **Acknowledgments:**

253 We thank Wenhao Qin, Chuanwen Yu, Fenglin Huang and Tao Zhang for helping to
254 collect the field data. We also appreciate suggestions from Yi Ding from Chinese Academy
255 of Forestry that improve the manuscript, and assistance from Fang Liu from Chinese
256 Academy of Forestry and Qiang Zhang from Institute of Zoology, Guangdong Academy of
257 Sciences in identifying the animals.

258

259 **Competing interests:**

260 Authors declare that they have no competing interests.

261

262 **Funding:**

263 Science and Technology Basic Work project from Ministry of Science and Technology of
264 the People's Republic of China (2019FY101607).

265

266 **References**

267 Andersson M, Krebs J. 1978. On the evolution of hoarding behaviour. *Anim Behav*

268 **26**:707–711. doi: 10.1016/0003-3472(78)90137-9

269 Cao L, Xiao Z, Guo C, Chen J. 2011. Scatter-hoarding rodents as secondary seed

270 dispersers of a frugivore-dispersed tree *Scleropyrum wallichianum* in a defaunated

271 Xishuangbanna tropical forest, China. *Integr Zool* **6**:227–234. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-

272 4877.2011.00248.x

273 Chang G, Zhang Z. 2014. Functional traits determine formation of mutualism and

274 predation interactions in seed-rodent dispersal system of a subtropical forest. *Acta*

275 *Oecologica* **55**:43–50. doi: 10.1016/j.actao.2013.11.004

276 Cheng J, Xiao Z, Zhang Z. 2005. Seed consumption and caching on seeds of three

277 sympatric tree species by four sympatric rodent species in a subtropical forest, China.

278 *For Ecol Manage* **216**:331–341. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2005.05.045>

279 Detto M, Visser MD, Wright SJ, Pacala SW. 2019. Bias in the detection of negative

280 density dependence in plant communities. *Ecol Lett* **22**:1923–1939. doi:

281 10.1111/ele.13372

282 Duckworth JW, Tizard RJ, Molur S. 2016. *Hylopetes alboniger*. *IUCN Red List Threat*

283 *Species 2016 eT10600A22244563*. doi: 10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-

284 2.RLTS.T10600A22244563.en

- 285 Goheen JR, Swihart RK. 2003. Food-hoarding behavior of gray squirrels and North
286 American red squirrels in the central hardwoods region: Implications for forest
287 regeneration. *Can J Zool* **81**:1636–1639. doi: 10.1139/z03-143
- 288 Hadj-chikh LZ, Steele MA, Smallwood PD. 1996. Caching decisions by grey squirrels: A
289 test of the handling time and perishability hypotheses. *Anim Behav* **52**:941–948. doi:
290 10.1006/anbe.1996.0242
- 291 Hunt NH, Jinn J, Jacobs LF, Full RJ. 2021. Acrobatic squirrels learn to leap and land on
292 tree branches without falling. *Science* **373**:697–700. doi:10.1126/science.abe5753
- 293 Li YD, Xu H, Luo TS, Chen DX, Lin MX. 2012. Bio-species checklist of Jianfengling,
294 Hainan Island. Beijing: China Agriculture Press.
- 295 Lichti NI, Steele MA, Swihart RK. 2017. Seed fate and decision-making processes in
296 scatter-hoarding rodents. *Biol Rev* **92**:474–504. doi: 10.1111/brv.12240
- 297 Lutz JA, Furniss TJ, Johnson DJ, Davies SJ, Allen D, Alonso A, Anderson-Teixeira KJ,
298 Andrade A, Baltzer J, Becker KML, Blomdahl EM, Bourg NA, Bunyavejchewin S,
299 Burslem DFRP, Cansler CA, Cao K, Cao M, Cárdenas D, Chang LW, Chao K-J,
300 Chao WC, Chiang JM, Chu C, Chuyong GB, Clay K, Condit R, Cordell S, Dattaraja
301 HS, Duque A, Ewango CEN, Fischer GA, Fletcher C, Freund JA, Giardina C,
302 Germain SJ, Gilbert GS, Hao Z, Hart T, Hau BCH, He F, Hector A, Howe RW, Hsieh
303 CF, Hu YH, Hubbell SP, Inman-Narahari FM, Itoh A, Janík D, Kassim AR, Kenfack
304 D, Korte L, Král K, Larson AJ, Li Y, Lin Y, Liu S, Lum S, Ma K, Makana JR, Malhi
305 Y, McMahon SM, McShea WJ, Memiaghe HR, Mi X, Morecroft M, Musili PM,
306 Myers JA, Novotny V, de Oliveira A, Ong P, Orwig DA, Ostertag R, Parker GG,

- 307 Patankar R, Phillips RP, Reynolds G, Sack L, Song GZM, Su SH, Sukumar R, Sun I-
308 F, Suresh HS, Swanson ME, Tan S, Thomas DW, Thompson J, Uriarte M, Valencia
309 R, Vicentini A, Vrška T, Wang X, Weiblen GD, Wolf A, Wu SH, Xu H, Yamakura T,
310 Yap S, Zimmerman JK. 2018. Global importance of large-diameter trees. *Glob Ecol*
311 *Biogeogr* **27**:849–864. doi: 10.1111/geb.12747
- 312 Qiao W, Wang Z, Wang D, Zhang L. 2021. A new mortise and tenon timber structure and
313 its automatic construction system. *J Build Eng* **44**:103369. doi:
314 10.1016/j.job.2021.103369
- 315 Rong K, Yang H, Ma J, Zong C, Cai T. 2013. Food availability and animal space use both
316 determine cache density of Eurasian red squirrels. *PLoS One* **8**:e80632. doi:
317 10.1371/journal.pone.0080632
- 318 Sanz CM, Call J, Boesch C. 2013. Tool use in animals: Cognition and ecology. New York,
319 NJ: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511894800
- 320 Shaw RC. 2021. Animal tool use: Many tools make light work for wild parrots. *Curr Biol*
321 **31**:R1383–R1385. doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2021.08.036
- 322 Steele MA, Manierre S, Genna T, Contreras TA, Smallwood PD, Pereira ME. 2006. The
323 innate basis of food-hoarding decisions in grey squirrels: evidence for behavioural
324 adaptations to the oaks. *Anim Behav* **71**:155–160. doi: 10.1016/j.anbehav.2005.05.005
- 325 Steele MA, Yi X. 2020. Squirrel-seed interactions: The evolutionary strategies and impact
326 of squirrels as both seed predators and seed dispersers. *Front Ecol Evol* **8**:259. doi:
327 10.3389/fevo.2020.00259

- 328 Tizard RJ. 2016. *Hylopetes phayrei*. *IUCN Red List Threat Species 2016*
329 *eT10605A22244042*. doi:10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-2.RLTS.T10605A22244042.en
- 330 Xiao Z, Gao X, Zhang Z. 2013. The combined effects of seed perishability and seed size
331 on hoarding decisions by Pére David's rock squirrels. *Behav Ecol Sociobiol* **67**:1067–
332 1075. doi:10.1007/s00265-013-1531-8
- 333 Xiao Z, Zhang Z, Wang Y. 2004. Dispersal and germination of big and small nuts of
334 *Quercus serrata* in a subtropical broad-leaved evergreen forest. *For Ecol Manage*
335 **195**:141–150. doi:10.1016/j.foreco.2004.02.041
- 336 Xu H, Li YD, Luo TS, Chen DX, Lin MX, Wu JH, Li YP, Yang H, Zhou Z. 2015.
337 Jianfengling tropical mountain rain forest dynamic plot: Community characteristics,
338 tree species and their distribution patterns. Beijing, China: Chinese Forestry
339 Publishing House.
- 340 Xu H, Liu S, Li Y, Zang R, He F. 2012. Assessing non-parametric and area-based methods
341 for estimating regional species richness. *J Veg Sci* **23**:1006–1012. doi:10.1111/j.1654-
342 1103.2012.01423.x

343

344 **Data availability:**

345 All data are available in the main text or the supplementary files.

346

347

348 **Figures and Tables**

349 **Figure 1. Nuts stored after surface preparation by flying squirrels.** (A) Nut of *C.*

350 *edithiae* (Skan) Schottky, with chewed grooves outlined in red. Nuts of *C. edithiae* fixed

351 on trees, with (B-D) one, (E) two non-connected, or (F) spiral carved grooves encircling

352 the nuts. (G) Nut of *C. patelliformis* (Chun) Y. C. Hsu et H. W. Jen, with chewed grooves

353 outlined in red. (H-I) Nuts of *C. patelliformis* fixed on trees, with carved grooves on the

354 bottom fixed on (J) bamboos and (K-L) lianas, between the big petioles of (M) trees and

355 (N) palms.

356 **Figure 2. Variation in carved grooves depending on the storage situation.** The carved

357 surface grooves on nuts of *C. edithiae* mostly encircle the middle of the nut, with (A) one,

358 (B) one spiral, or (C) two separated grooves. The grooves on nuts of *C. patelliformis* are

359 distributed on the bottom of the nuts, with (D) 2, (E) 4, (F) 6, (G) 8, (H) 10 symmetrically

360 or (I) randomly distributed grooves.

361 **Figure 3. Nuts are fixed tightly between twigs generally meeting at angles of 25-40°.**

362 (A) *C. edithiae* nuts. (B) *C. patelliformis* nuts.

363 **Figure 4. Nuts were stored mainly on small plants between twigs with diameters of**

364 **0.10 - 0.60 cm.** (A) Histogram of diameters of twigs used to store nuts of *C. edithiae*. (B)

365 Diameters of twigs used to store *C. edithiae* nuts were not significantly correlated. (C)

366 Histogram of diameters of twigs used to store nuts of *C. patelliformis*. (D) Diameters of

367 twigs used to store *C. patelliformis* were significantly correlated. Twig 1 and twig 2 are

368 two twigs fixed the nuts.

369 **Figure 5. Grooves carved by squirrels on most *C. edithiae* nuts were 0.2 - 0.6 cm in**

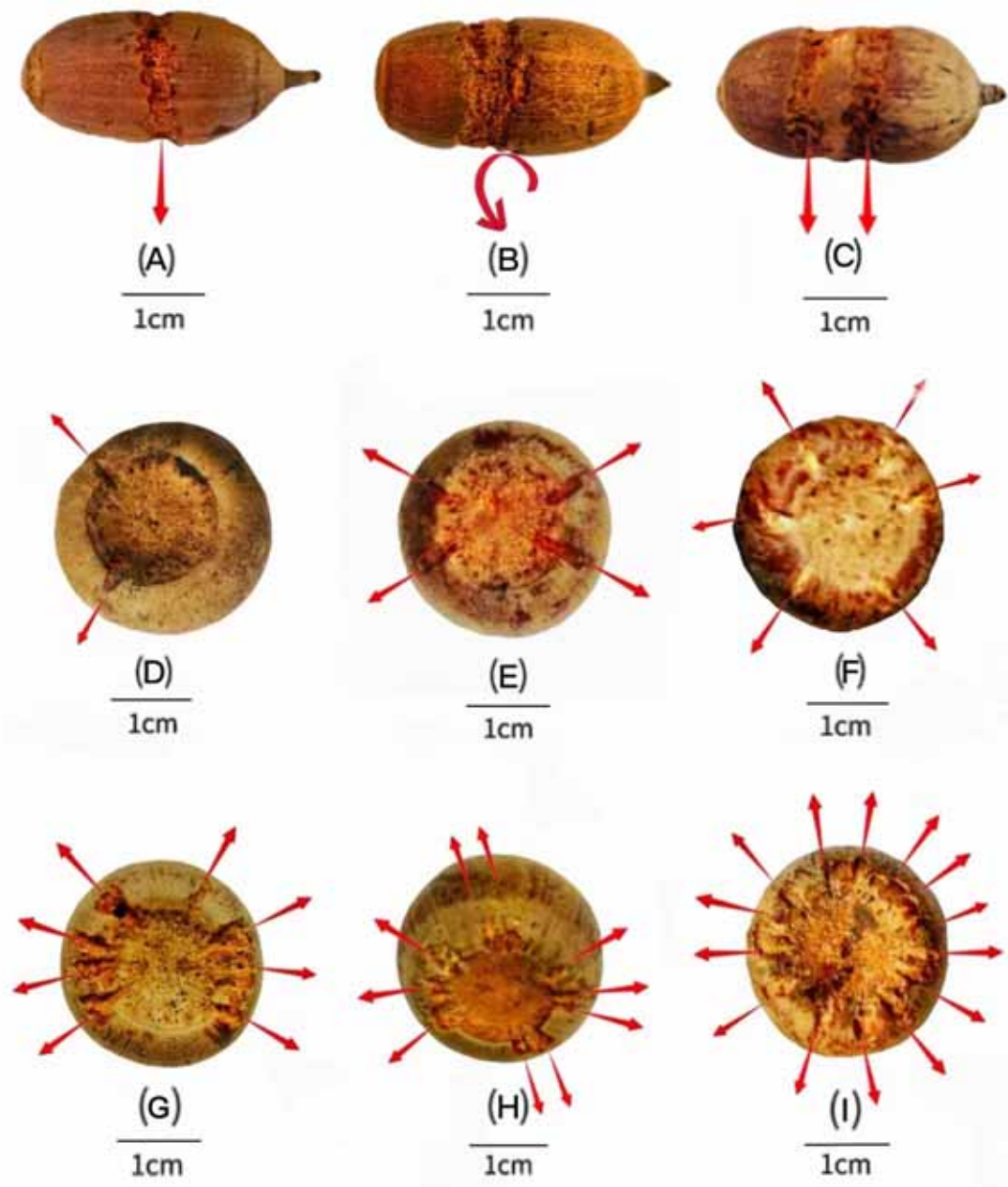
370 **width.**

371

372



377 **Figure 1. Nuts stored after surface preparation by flying squirrels.** (A) Nut of *C.*
378 *edithiae* (Skan) Schottky, with chewed grooves outlined in red. Nuts of *C. edithiae* fixed
379 on trees, with (B-D) one, (E) two non-connected, or (F) spiral carved grooves encircling
380 the nuts. (G) Nut of *C. patelliformis* (Chun) Y. C. Hsu et H. W. Jen, with chewed grooves
381 outlined in red. (H-I) Nuts of *C. patelliformis* fixed on trees, with carved grooves on the
382 bottom fixed on (J) bamboos and (K-L) lianas, between the big petioles of (M) trees and
383 (N) palms.



384

385 **Figure 2. Variation in carved grooves depending on the storage situation.** The carved

386 surface grooves on nuts of *C. edithae* mostly encircle the middle of the nut, with (A) one,

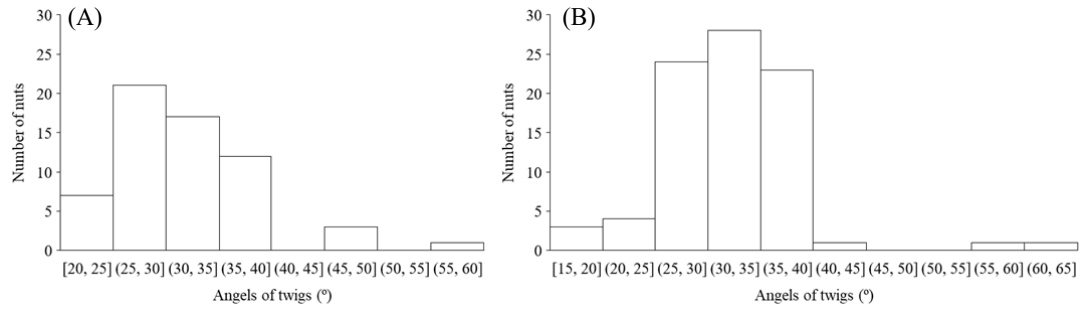
387 (B) one spiral, or (C) two separated grooves. The grooves on nuts of *C. patelliformis* are

388 distributed on the bottom of the nuts, with (D) 2, (E) 4, (F) 6, (G) 8, (H) 10 symmetrically

389 or (I) randomly distributed grooves.

390

391



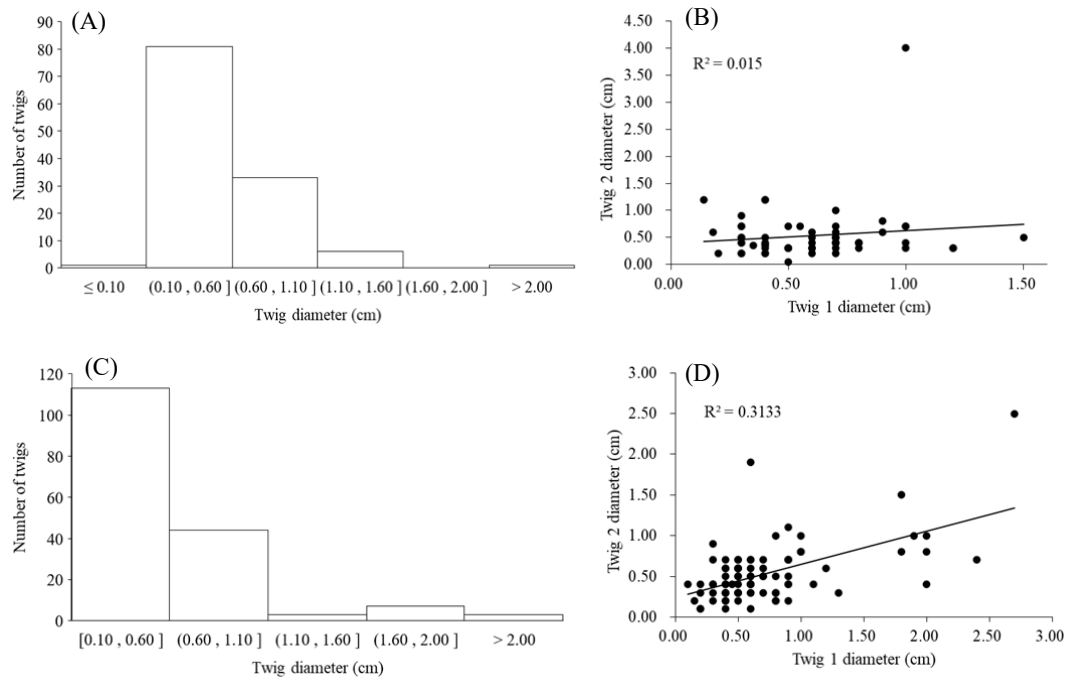
392

393 **Figure 3. Nuts are fixed tightly between twigs generally meeting at angles of 25-40°.**

394 (A) *C. edithiae* nuts. (B) *C. patelliformis* nuts.

395

396

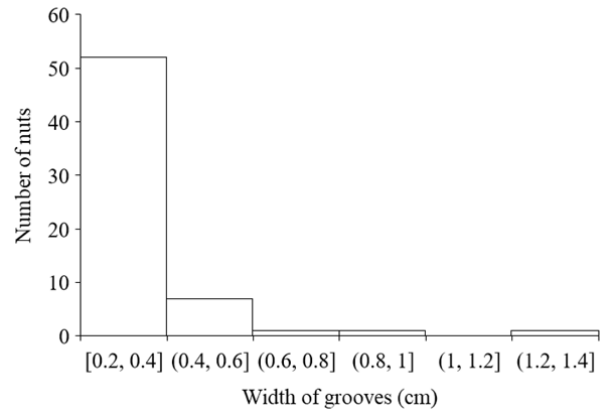


397

398

399 **Figure 4. Nuts were stored mainly on small plants between twigs with diameters of**
400 **0.10 - 0.60 cm. (A) Histogram of diameters of twigs used to store nuts of *C. edithiae*. (B)**
401 **Diameters of twigs used to store *C. edithiae* nuts were not significantly correlated. (C)**
402 **Histogram of diameters of twigs used to store nuts of *C. patelliformis*. (D) Diameters of**
403 **twigs used to store *C. patelliformis* were significantly correlated. Twig 1 and twig 2 are**
404 **two twigs fixed the nuts.**
405

406



407

408 **Figure 5. Grooves carved by squirrels on most *C. edithiae* nuts were 0.2 - 0.6 cm in**

409 **width.**

410

411

412 **Supplementary Files**

413 **Supplementary Figures 1 to 6**

414 **Supplementary Tables 1 to 3**

415

416 **Supplementary Media files 1 to 5.**

417 **Footage from infrared cameras of squirrels checking and removing nuts from the**
418 **storage sites.**

419 There are two folders, each with footage about one of the two squirrel species.

420 In the “By *Hylopetes alboniger*” folder, there are three media files about this species,

421 including

422 Media 1, shows squirrel 1 checking nuts at the storage sites.

423 Media 2, shows squirrel 2 removing nuts from storage sites.

424 Media 3, shows squirrel 3 removing nuts from storage sites.

425 In the “By *Hylopetes phayrei electilis*” folder, there are two media files about this species,

426 including

427 Media 4, shows squirrel 4 checking nuts at storage sites.

428 Media 5, shows squirrel 5 removing nuts from storage sites.

429

430 **Supplementary Media files 6 to 11.**

431 **Footage showing that shaking the plants does not dislodge nuts stored by squirrels.**

432 There are two folders, one for each of the two principal Fagaceae species.

433 In the “*Cyclobalanopsis edithiae*” folder, there are three media files, including

434 Media 6, shows footage of shaking a liana with a stored nut.

435 Media 7, shows footage of shaking a sapling with a stored nut.

436 Media 8, shows footage of shaking a sapling with a stored nut.

437 In the “*Cyclobalanopsis patelliformis*” folder, there are three media files, including

438 Media 9, footage of shaking a liana with a stored nut.

439 Media 10, footage of shaking a sapling with a stored nut.

440 Media 11, footage of shaking a sapling with a stored nut.

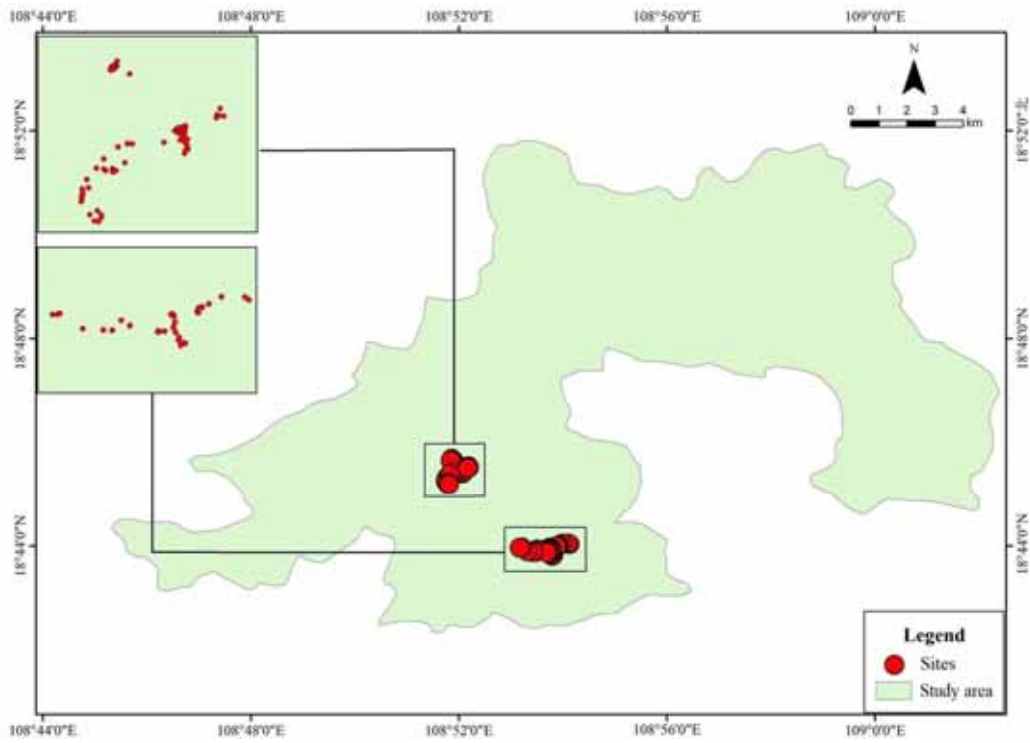
441

442 **Supplementary Data file 1.**

443 **The plants used to store nuts and their growth form.**

444

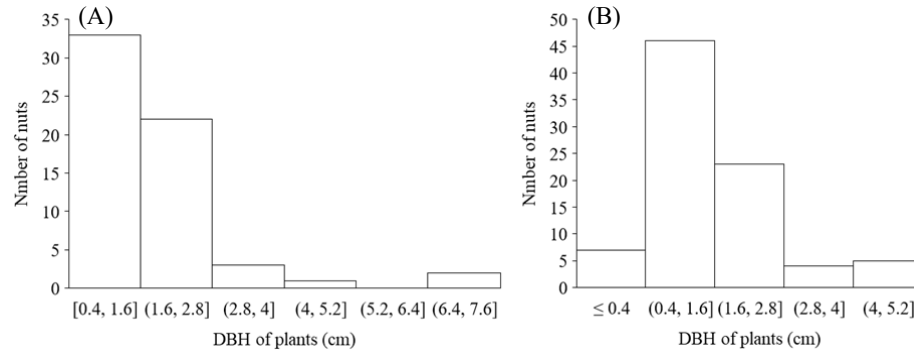
445



Supplementary Figure 1.

Spatial distribution of the 151 suspended nuts observed in Jianfengling Nature Reserve, Hainan, China

451



452

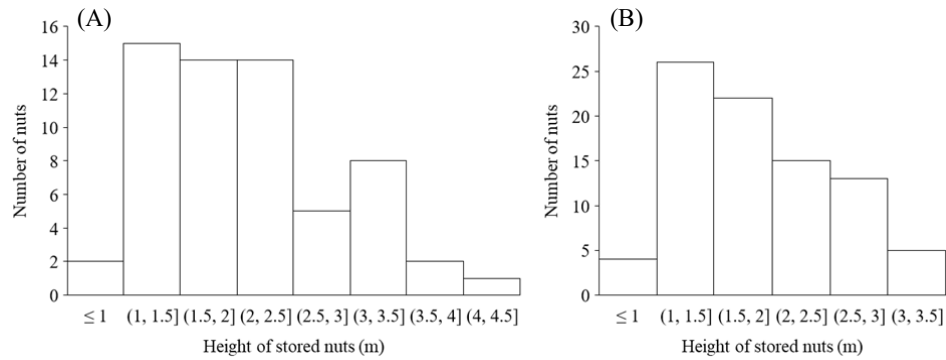
453 **Supplementary Figure 2.**

454 **Most nuts were stored on small plants with diameter at breast height (DBH) ranging**

455 **from 0.4 - 1.6 cm. (A) *C. edithiae* nuts. (B) *C. patelliformis* nuts.**

456

457



458

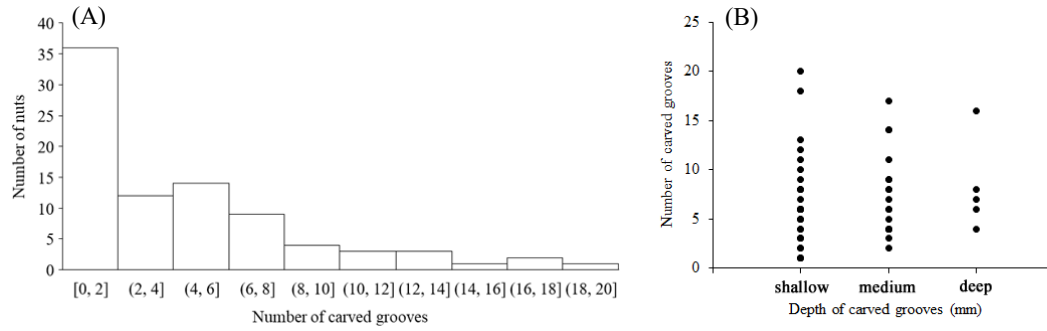
459 **Supplementary Figure 3.**

460 **Nuts were generally stored on the first to third branches at 1.5-2.5 m aboveground.**

461 (A) *C. edithiae* nuts. (B) *C. patelliformis* nuts.

462

463



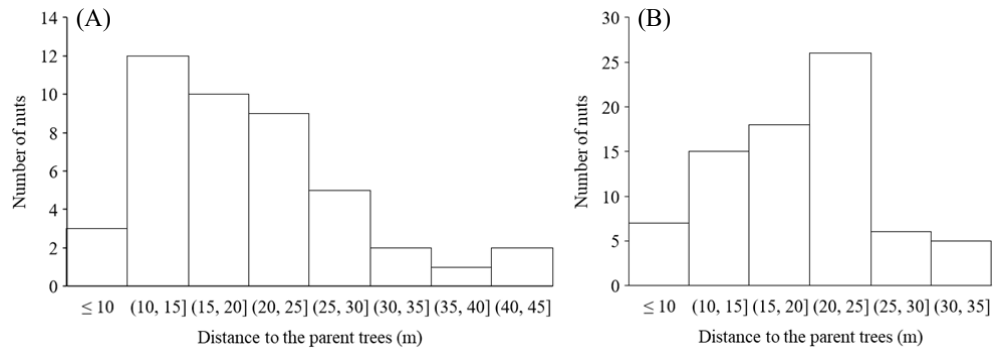
464

465 **Supplementary Figure 4.**

466 **Number of grooves carved on the oblate nuts of *C. patelliformis*.** (A) Most nuts had

467 fewer than 8 grooves. (B) The depth of most grooves was shallow to medium.

468



469

470 **Supplementary Figure 5.**

471 **Distance from storage sites to potential parent trees for the nuts varied from 10 m to**

472 **25 m. (A) *C. edithiae* nuts. (B) *C. patelliformis* nuts.**

473



476 **Supplementary Figure 6.**

477 **After long (e.g., >ca. 365 days) storage, nuts become not fresh. (A) lost germination**
478 **ability, (B) germinated or (C-E) were destroyed by insects.**

479

480

481 **Supplementary Table 1.**

482 **Main Fagaceae species found in a 60 ha plot in the Jianfengling forests.**

Species	Abundance
<i>Castanopsis carlesii</i> (Hemsley) Hayata	3269
<i>Castanopsis fissa</i> (Champion ex Benth) Rehder & E. H. Wilson	2803
<i>Castanopsis jianfenglingensis</i> Duanmu	2297
<i>Castanopsis tonkinensis</i> Seemen	953
<i>Castanopsis ledongensis</i> C. C. Huang & Y. T. Chang	335
<i>Castanopsis fabri</i> Hance	113
<i>Castanopsis hystrix</i> J. D. Hooker & Thomson ex A. de Candolle	35
<i>Cyclobalanopsis edithiae</i> (Skan) Schottky	1645
<i>Cyclobalanopsis patelliformis</i> (Chun) Y. C. Hsu & H. W. Jen	1207
<i>Cyclobalanopsis phanera</i> (Chun) Y. C. Hsu & H. W. Jen	886
<i>Cyclobalanopsis fleuryi</i> (Hickel & A. Camus) Chun ex Q. F. Zheng	568
<i>Cyclobalanopsis neglecta</i> Schottky	392
<i>Cyclobalanopsis blakei</i> (Skan) Schottky	279
<i>Cyclobalanopsis hui</i> (Chun) Chun ex Y. C. Hsu & H. W. Jen	220
<i>Lithocarpus longipedicellatus</i> (Hickel & A. Camus) A. Camus	2842
<i>Lithocarpus pseudovestitus</i> A. Camus	2427
<i>Lithocarpus fenzelianus</i> A. Camus	1751
<i>Lithocarpus amygdalifolius</i> (Skan) Hayata	1360
<i>Lithocarpus handelianus</i> A. Camus	1046
<i>Lithocarpus fenestratus</i> (Roxburgh) Rehder	323
<i>Lithocarpus howii</i> Chun	130
<i>Lithocarpus hancei</i> (Benth.) Rehd.	71

483

484 **Supplementary Table 2.**

485 **The types of plants used for nut storage.**

Plant type	Number of individuals	Percentage of all individuals (%)
Alive tree	108	71.5
Dead tree	17	11.3
Alive liana	19	12.6
Dead liana	2	1.3
Bamboo	5	3.3
Total	151	100

486

487

488 **Supplementary Table 3.**

489 **Nine squirrels living in Jianfengling, Hainan Island, China**

Species and subspecies name	Body length / mm
<i>Tamiops maritimus</i> (Bonhote, 1900)	105~134
<i>Dremomys pyrrhomerus</i> (Thomas, 1895)	194~215
<i>Hylopetes alboniger</i> (Hodgson, 1870)	180~203
<i>Hylopetes phayrei electilis</i> (Allen, 1925)	123~173
<i>Dremomys rufigenis</i> (Blanford, 1878)	170~250
<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i> (Pallas, 1779)	198~252
<i>Belomys pearsonii</i> (Gray, 1842)	180~260
<i>Petaurista albiventer</i> (Gray, 1834)	420~520
<i>Ratufa bicolor</i> (Sparrmann, 1778)	350~505

490 Note: The data in this table are referenced from the below literature.

491 [1] Liu, S.Y., Wu, Y., Li, S. Chinese Beasts Illustrated. Beijing: Straits Books Publishing
492 House, 403-409 (2020).

493 [2] Andrew, T. S. A Guide to the Mammals of China. Arizona State: Princeton University
494 Press, 191-202 (2008).

495 [3] Pan, Q.H., Wang, Y.X., Yan, K. Colorful Illustrations of Chinese Mammals. Beijing:
496 China Forestry Press, 337-348 (2007).

497 [4] Huang, W.J. Chinese Rodents. Beijing: Fudan University Press, 60-85 (1995).

498 [5] Zheng, Z.M., Jiang, Z.K., Chen, A.G. Rodents Zoology. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong
499 University Press, 281-294 (2008).

500 [6] Li, S., Yang, J.X., Jiang, X.L. & Wang, Y.X. Geographic variation in skull morphology
501 of the giant squirrel *Ratufa bicolor* (Sciuridae: Ratufinae) from China. Journal of
502 Veterinary Medicine, 2, 201-206 (2008).

503