



## ECOLOGY

### Don't Touch My Cache

For plants, seed dispersal is critical for survival. It can provide an escape from competition, disease, and predators. One way seeds are dispersed is by seed-caching predators—their few forgotten seeds may eventually germinate and grow into new plants. One concern, however, is that although these animals move seeds away from competition with their parent plant, they may place them in competition with other conspecifics nearby. Hirsch *et al.* addressed this by following hundreds of radio-tagged black palm seeds for over a year on Barro Colorado Island. They found, instead, that the tree's main disperser, the Central American agouti, distributes its seeds to areas with low conspecific density. The distance from the parental tree and other conspecifics increased the more the seed was moved by agoutis, up to 18 times in some cases. The agoutis may be selecting areas of low black palm density for their caches, and the subsequent moving of their seeds, in order to avoid pilfering by other agoutis. Thus, the efforts of the agoutis to protect their caches result in better germination conditions for the trees and are probably worth the cost of the seeds that aren't forgotten. — SNV

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