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Ontogeny of behaviour: Mother–pup interactions in the giant squirrel *Ratufa indica*

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Body size and life history traits are closely related; larger taxa breed less frequently than smaller ones and their offspring have longer maturation times compared to smaller sized taxa. The large tree squirrel *Ratufa indica* produces a single pup per breeding episode; breeding may not occur every year. The single pup is fully weaned only after six months and also shares the same nest with its mother for several months after weaning. There is therefore a long period of association between mother and pup. During this time, many important interactions occur between mother and pup. The most interesting interactions occur with regard to the ontogeny of feeding and of nest-building behaviour. Pups imitate maternal actions which are most pronounced when finer tissue-level manipulations are required to prepare food resources for consumption. Nest building is also a skill which improves over time. This talk will highlight the various types of mother–pup interactions that occur and will emphasise the processes of behavioural development. Literature on mother–pup interactions is sparse in sciurids barring the social ground squirrels. This is probably due to the quick weaning, larger litter sizes and rapid pup maturation in most diurnal tree squirrels that have been investigated. Such interactions have not been investigated

in nocturnal flying squirrels although several taxa are of the same size as *Ratufa* and must have similar life history strategies. This study therefore provides new information on the ontogeny of behaviour and of mother–pup interactions in tree squirrels.