

A COMPARISON OF THE FOOD OF THE BLACK-BACKED JACKAL AND CARACAL

by CHRIS STUART

In the Cape Province the caracal (*Felis caracal*) is considered to be the principal wild predator of small domestic stock, with the black-backed jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) claiming second place.

Although individuals within the two species are responsible for economically significant stock losses, many of these predators have not, and will not, catch sheep and goats. Looking at the Table some readers may ask, 'If this is the case, why are the percentage occurrences of domestic stock so high?'

The predators killed by hunters during the course of the survey were taken in 'problem' areas and the hunters supplying the material were above average in efficiency and selectivity. Sadly, many so-called problem animal hunters are not as efficient or selective as they would have us believe.

Mammal prey plays a much more important role in the diet regime of the caracal than in that of the black-backed jackal. Larger mammal prey (domestic stock, antelope, carnivores and hyrax) is much more important to the caracal. The largest prey species killed by this cat recorded in the present study were adult bushbuck ewes (+ 28 kg), sub-adult bushbuck rams (+ 32 kg) and adult sheep and goats. Other antelope species taken were blue duiker, grey duiker, steenbok, grysbok and grey rhebuck. Black-backed jackal killed very few antelope, namely grey duiker, steenbok and a springbok lamb.

Carrion was more important to the jackal. In fact there is no mention of caracal scavenging, in the literature. We encountered several instances of caracal scavenging (excluding stomach contents), including Cape fur-seal carcasses washed up along the south-western Cape coast.

We found no reptile or invertebrate remains in caracal stomachs but were encountered in jackal stomachs. Plant material in caracal stomachs consisted only of grass and was almost certainly not taken in as food but probably serves much the same purpose as with domestic dogs and cats. Black-backed jackal deliberately take berries and other fruits. In a study I undertook on this jackal in the Namib Desert we found that at certain times of the year berries and fruits played a very important part in its diet.

With studies on diet of carnivores one cannot say that the results of research in one area will apply in other areas other than in a general sense. In fact not only differing from area to area but also within the same area from season to season and year to year.

**COMPARISON OF BLACK-BACKED JACKAL AND CARACAL DIET IN THE
CAPE PROVINCE. BASED ON ANALYSIS OF 114 JACKAL AND 246 CARACAL
STOMACH CONTENTS**

Food Category	Black-backed Jackal % Tot. Occ.	Caracal % Tot. Occ.
MAMMALS	57,0	92,0
Rodents	16,5	10,4
Domestic stock	14,9	29,2
Carrion	13,3	0,3
Antelope	3,2	33,0
Unidentified	3,2	11,0
Lagomorphs	2,6	5,5
Insectivores	1,7	1,0
Carnivores	1,1	5,5
Hyrax (Dassie)	0,5	7,1
BIRDS	12,7	8,0
REPTILES	2,7	—
INVERTEBRATES	7,9	—
PLANT	19,7	5,2 (only green grass)

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