

Series: 1-001/1

BLACK-BACKED JACKAL Hunter and scavenger

Scientific name: *Canis mesomelas*



Photograph taken by BB Janecke

Description

- Black-backed jackals have a reddish-brown to tan coat, and a distinctive grey-silver to black saddle with white flecks on their back. The tail has a black tip. The ears are fairly large, triangular, and reddish at the back. Males are larger and heavier than females.

Size of adult	Male	Female
Total length	83-130 cm	77-120 cm
Tail length	31-40 cm	23-37 cm
Body mass	6.-12.5 kg	4.8-11.5 kg

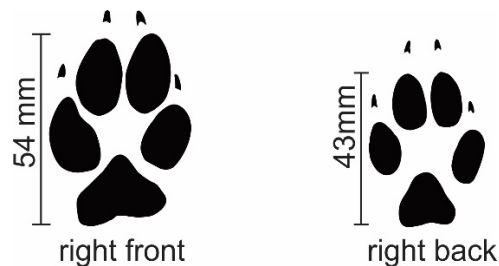
- They reach the age of 6-8 years in the wild.
- Males and females will mark their territory depending on food and competition.
- They usually live in breeding pairs; the pair-bond between a male and his female is very strong.
- They are active mainly at night (occasionally appear during daytime). During the day they usually rest in shady high-laying areas.
- Where water is available, they will drink regularly.
- They have a very strong sense of smell and hearing; their most important means of communication are based on these senses. Adults scent-mark with urine and faeces on

conspicuous objects such as grass tufts or rocks. Calling is also used as a means of communication.

- The main predator of the black-backed jackal in some areas is the leopard.

Track/spoor

- Dog-like tracks that show claw marks.
- 5 toes on front feet, but first toe is set back and does not mark the spoor. 4 toes on hind feet.
- Profile: oval - longer than wide.



Role in landscape

Black-backed jackals are highly adaptable. They are generalist predators, which means that they are opportunistic feeders, eating whatever is most abundant and easily obtained.

They are very effective hunters. Where top predators are absent, black-backed jackals have taken over this role.

They keep the veld clean by scavenging. By being around a carcass, they may indicate to vultures that it is safe to eat.

Jackals are part of an intricate network. Unselectively removing jackals can lead to an increase in small and medium-sized predator numbers, creating new problems.

Reproduction

- Black-backed jackals breed only once a year (monoestrus), and mainly use underground dens for whelping.
- Litters are usually born in August, but this may vary between regions, depending on habitat and food. Litter size may vary from 1 to 9, but there are usually 4 to 6 pups in a litter.
- Both the male and the female (and occasionally a helper - an offspring from the previous year's litter) will care for the pups.

Feeding behaviour

Diet

Black-backed jackals are omnivorous, and their diet is determined by the habitat that they live in. The diet includes:

- Insects and other invertebrates
- Rodents
- Reptiles
- Carrion (the remains of dead animals)
- Frogs
- Birds
- Smaller antelope species such as steenbok and springbok
- Plant material (berries, seeds and fruits)
- Domesticated sheep, goats and cattle

Hunting technique/feeding signs

Black-backed jackals opportunistically hunt in groups when suitable prey is available. They may also congregate at the site of a carcass but will return to their own territories.

They chase prey, biting as the prey runs. Prey's ears are often torn in the process.

Larger prey is killed with a throat bite that suffocates the animal, or by tearing open the abdomen.

Clear bite-marks are usually visible between the ear and eye of the prey. Bite-marks can also appear on the back legs and the udder. They tend to take one animal per hunt.

Where larger predators dominate, a large part of the diet is made up of carrion scavenged from their kills. Where animals die of disease, drought or other environmental factors, scavenging will also be the main feeding behaviour of the black-backed jackal.

- Black-backed jackals usually start feeding in the groin or thigh area (leaving a flap of skin, hollowed out underneath). They also hollow out the chest cavity, eating all the organs. The meat around the shoulder of larger prey is eaten, and they may remove the front legs of smaller prey. Intestines are often eaten and scattered around.
- Rib ends are often chewed. The nose and ears of prey is also eaten in some cases.
- As with other canine species, some black-backed jackals may bury what they cannot eat

but will usually not remove the carcass from the killing site.

Management methods

Black-backed jackals are adaptable, with a high reproductive capacity.

On livestock farms, they become a problem particularly during lambing and calving seasons. It was estimated that black-backed jackals have killed a total of 113 624 head of small livestock over a 2 year period in the five major small livestock producing provinces of South Africa. It is not advisable to attempt to eradicate them from an area. Thus, management should be practised and aimed (as far as possible) at the individuals that are causing damage.

Non-lethal

- Predator-proof fencing
- Electric fencing (especially around lambing camps)
- Kraaling
- Deterrents - noise, light and scent
- Shepherd
- Collars
- Guard animals

Lethal

- Foothold traps
- Call-and-shoot
- Livestock Protection Collars (1080)
- Poison ejectors

Other management methods that can be used, include:

- Multispecies grazing (for example, cattle and sheep grazing together)
- Changing livestock breeding (adapting the time of lambing and calving seasons so that they do not coincide with periods when black-backed jackals have higher energy requirements)
- Selective grazing (avoiding certain areas during periods of higher predation risk)

When used in combination, some of these methods can be very effective. It is important to keep in mind that situations on farms differ and management methods that are effective on one farm may not be as effective on another farm.

Consult your local DEA/ DAFF office for legal aspects regarding predation management.

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/natagri/departments-and-divisions/animal-wildlife-and-grassland-sciences-home/alpru/products-and-services>

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