

Series: 1-008/2

BLACK-BACKED JACKAL HUNTING TECHNIQUE AND FEEDING SIGNS

Where food is abundant, or to hunt larger prey, black-backed jackals may occasionally form packs. In the wild, 6 – 12 jackals have been observed co-operating in a hunt.

They may also congregate in much larger numbers at the site of a carcass. In these cases, territory boundaries can break down, which means that newcomers are accepted at the feeding site, with no aggressive interactions or submissive behaviour by the newcomers. After feeding, jackals return to their own territories.

Where food is limited, they tend to run singly. In areas where food is scarce, pairs have been observed to split up when searching for food and coming together only when they return to their den.

In a study conducted in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, Botswana, it was observed that when jackals preyed on adult impala, they killed individuals that were old or in extremely poor condition. However, a single adult black-backed jackal is capable of killing healthy adult impala, as observed in the Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana.

Black-backed jackals tend to take one animal per hunt.

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

Some authors maintain that measuring the distance between the punctures caused by the upper canines at the site of the bite marks on the carcass is an accurate method to identify a jackal kill. This is due to the fact that the distance between the upper canines of black-backed jackal is less than that of even the smallest domestic dog. However, others argue that this method cannot conclusively distinguish between the bite of a caracal and a jackal. Therefore, other signs, such as the distribution of bite wounds on the body, and the feeding pattern should also be considered to identify a jackal kill.

Other characteristics of a jackal kill include:

- Clear bite-marks are usually visible between the ear and eye of larger prey such as adult sheep, impala or springbuck. Two small punctures visible on either side of the windpipe. Jackal bites are shallower than those of caracals.
- With small lambs, puncture marks are usually visible just below the eye and below the ear or at the base of the jaw.
- Bite-marks can also appear on the back legs and the udder.
- Bruising around the bitten areas (indicating that the animal was alive when attacked)
- Signs of frenzied activity are present when jackals had made the kill, as opposed to where they were only scavenging.
- The absence of the spoor of other carnivores at a fresh kill.

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Signs that black-backed jackals fed on the carcass include:

- The carcass is usually opened on the flank: between the hip and the ribs, or in the groin or thigh area.
- When food is abundant, black-backed jackals eat very selectively from carcasses
 - They eat the kidneys, heart and liver, hollowing out the chest cavity;
 - Muscle is also eaten neatly (hollowed out) from under the skin, leaving a flap of skin
 - Meat around the shoulder of larger prey is eaten, and the front legs of smaller prey may be removed
- Intestines are often eaten and scattered around.
- Rib ends are often chewed. In some cases, the nose and ears of prey is also eaten.
- Where a large group of jackals is present, every edible part of the prey is eaten. If undisturbed, the only remains of larger prey are the stomach contents, some intestinal contents, and the skeleton - which is picked clean, exposing each individual vertebra and rib.
- The skeleton of large prey is often still intact, or some identifiable remnant is usually left.
- As with other canine species, some black-backed jackals may bury what they cannot eat or bury regurgitated food, but will usually not remove the carcass from the killing site.



Photograph taken by A.J. Strauss. Feeding patterns of black-backed jackal are evident: the carcass was opened at the flank; stomach and intestines removed to get to the organs; and a flap of skin can be seen where the muscle of the hind leg has been eaten out from under it.

Predation on livestock tends to be worst during droughts, during times when the jackal's natural food sources are diminished (e.g. during winter), and during times when sheep are weakened.

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Consult your local DEFF (environmental affairs) or DARDLR (department of agriculture) office for legal aspects regarding predation management

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