

Series:2_001/2

CARACAL

Scientific name: *Caracal caracal*



Photograph taken by Q Kruger

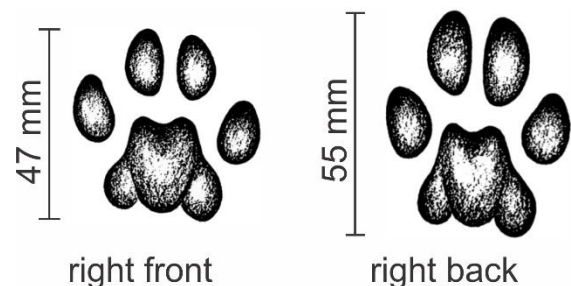
Description

- Caracals have a short reddish-brown coat. The chin, throat, and belly are white. The belly has faint dark spots. The pointed ears are black at the back with white hair in between and a tuft of black hair at the tip. The body is long and slender with long legs. Females have a lighter build than males. The hindquarters are slightly higher than the shoulders. Caracals have a short tapering tail. A narrow black line runs from each eye to the nose, and the face is short with powerful jaws.
- An average life-span of between 12 and 19 years.
- Solitary, except when mating or when kittens accompany females.
- They are generally silent, and can hide in even the most meagre cover.
- Males are territorial with a home range that overlaps with that of two or more females.
- Home ranges of females overlap, but they avoid contact by leaving signals such as urine, scat or tree scratchings
- When a caracal is killed or removed from its home-range, this vacuum will be filled by a young dispersing caracal.

- They are active mainly at night, but if undisturbed, they may also be active during certain parts of the day.
- They can tolerate dry conditions by being able to go without water for long periods, surviving on the water contained in the blood of prey.
- The main predator of the caracal in some areas is the leopard.
- They are skilful climbers and possess extraordinary speed and leaping ability.
- Total length: 75-120 cm
- Tail length: 15-35 cm
- Height: 45 cm
- Body mass: 8-18 kg

Track/spoor

- Paws are remarkably large.
- 5 toes on each front paw, with the innermost toe, or dewclaw, located higher up on the front leg and not showing in the spoor. The dewclaw is remarkably strong and is used to grip prey.
- 4 toes on each hind paw.



Source: *A field guide to animal tracks of Southern Africa.*

Role in the landscape

Caracals are highly adaptable and can be found in almost every habitat in South Africa. They prefer habitats that provide enough shelter and have high prey density and diversity.

According to dietary studies conducted on caracal, the amount of natural prey eaten by caracals indicate that they play an important role in regulating the numbers of species that may cause damage on farms (e.g. hyrax and rodents, and under certain circumstances even competing predators).

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Reproduction

- Caracals do not have a set breeding season, but births peak in summer months.
- 2- 4 kittens in a litter
- Birth takes place in abandoned aardvark holes, hollow trees, rock crevices or dense vegetation.

Feeding behaviour

Diet

Like most predators, caracals are opportunistic feeders, eating anything from mammals and birds to reptiles and insects. However, they do prefer some prey species over others. The diet consists mainly of mammals. Depending on the availability and abundance of a particular prey species, caracals appear to prefer medium-sized mammals (such as hyrax or dassie, hares and rabbits, small antelope and springhare), and rodents.

Birds make up a much smaller proportion of caracals' diet, while reptiles and insects are only eaten in very small quantities.

In farming areas, small livestock generally make up only a small part of caracals' diet, but some caracals do appear to develop a taste for livestock

Hunting technique/feeding signs

- Caracals hunt alone, stalking prey at short range.
- Prey is killed with a bite to the throat or at the back of the neck, leaving two puncture wounds on either side of the throat or on either side of the spine.
- Claw marks on the shoulder, belly or hindquarters.
- With small livestock, more than one animal is sometimes killed in a hunt, but only one is eaten.
- Wool or hair is plucked out, and there is no loose flap of skin where the carcass is opened (as with black-backed jackal).
- The hind legs, brisket and shoulder of larger prey may be eaten. The stomach is not eaten, and bones are not broken or chewed.
- Remains of the prey may be covered with plant material or soil, or may be dragged to cover or hidden on lower branches of trees.

Management methods

On small livestock farms, the caracal is one of the major damage-causing predator species, but it can be excluded from an area with the correct preventative methods.

Non-lethal:

- Predator-proof fencing – with stones packed along the base
- Electric fencing – combined with predator-proof wire mesh fencing can be very effective
- Kraaling
- Deterrents - noise, light and scent
- Shepherd
- Collars (protecting the throat and neck, or containing a deterrent or cellular or GPS technology)
- Guard animals

Lethal:

The following methods can be effective at removing problem individuals, if used by a properly trained and skilled person:

- Foothold traps
- Call-and-shoot
- Cage traps
- Livestock Protection (poison) Collars (1080)
- Poison ejectors
- Packs of trained hunting dogs

The laws governing the use of lethal methods may differ from one province to the next, so contact your local conservation authority for queries about the use of any of these methods.

Other management methods that can be used, include:

- Multispecies grazing (for example, cattle and sheep grazing together)
- Regulation of livestock breeding (adapting lambing and calving seasons so that they do not coincide with periods when caracals have higher energy requirements or when natural prey numbers decrease).
- Selective pasturing (avoiding grazing livestock in certain camps during periods when they may be more at risk of attack by caracal)

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Consult your local DFFE (Environmental Affairs) or DALRRD (Department of Agriculture) office for legal aspects regarding

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