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## REPRODUCTION OF THE CARACAL

Caracals breed once a year. Females reach sexual maturity between 7 and 12 months but become receptive at 14 months. Males reach sexual maturity between 9 and 14 months of age. The oestrus period in females lasts 1-3 days, at intervals of 14 days. Females in oestrus typically show increased restlessness, a lack of appetite and frequent calling.

### Mating

A caracal male stays with the female only during the mating period. A female in heat may mate with more than one male.

Mating patterns are similar to that of domestic cats. During oestrus, mating takes place 4-5 times per day.

### Pregnancy & birth

Caracals can breed any time during the year, but pregnant females are most common during winter and spring. Litters are born all year round, but mostly in summer (November–March).

A female's body condition may determine when she breeds. The body condition, in turn, is dependent on environmental conditions and food availability.

After a pregnancy of 70-80 days, females give birth to 1-5 kittens in disused aardvark holes, hollow trees or similar hollows. Females successfully raise an average of 2 kittens.

### Kitten development

Caracal kittens weigh about 250g at birth. Ears are flat against the head for the first week and a half, but only stand fully erect by week 3. The eyes are open by day 10, but they can only see clearly several days after the eyes have opened. Claws are fully retractable by the age of 4 weeks.

Kittens start moving around the entrance of the den between 3½ to 4 weeks of age. From week 10 the kittens are capable of defending themselves vigorously.

Kittens have all their "milk" teeth by the age of 7 weeks. They start eating meat at 3½ to 8 weeks. Permanent canines begin to emerge at 4-5 months, and between 5 and 6 months they have displaced the first set (or "milk") canines. By the 10<sup>th</sup> month, all milk teeth have been replaced by permanent teeth.

### Caring for the young

Caracal females take care of kittens by themselves. They use only a small part of their home ranges for the first 3-4 months after giving birth. Then the home ranges expand again, and females move greater distances per night as the kittens grow older.

Kittens are weaned at 4-6 months but may stay with their mother until they are 4-12 months old. During the last 2 months they stay with her, she teaches them to hunt. At the time of her next oestrus, the mother or visiting male then chases them off.

The time during which females take care of the young (autumn), is usually also the time when most predation takes place on antelope and small livestock. During this time rodent densities are also low. The young leave the mother's territory when rodent density is at its lowest

e-mail: [PredationMC@UFS.ac.za](mailto:PredationMC@UFS.ac.za)

Tel: +27 51 401 2210

Website: [www.ufs.ac.za/pmc](http://www.ufs.ac.za/pmc)

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

T: +27 51 401 9111 | E: [info@ufs.ac.za](mailto:info@ufs.ac.za) | [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)

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