

Series: 2_004/2

Managing predation by caracal

Caracal can develop a taste for livestock but predation by caracal can be avoided or reduced using the methods discussed here.

For more detail on each of these methods, see also the management leaflets in our series on the black-backed jackal: Series 1-004/2 and Series 1-005/1

Precautionary techniques:

- **Fencing**

Predator-proof fencing (a wire-net fence with an overhang, an apron and stones packed along the base). The netting (mesh) should be at least 1 m high, preferably 1.2 m. Caracal are known to climb or jump over standard livestock and jackal-proof fencing. therefore, adding wire strands (increasing the height) and/or electric wire strands to existing livestock or predator-proof fencing can effectively keep caracal out.

- **Kraaling**

- **Multispecies grazing** (for example, cattle and sheep grazing together)

- **Deterrents** – (noise, light and scent)

- **Shepherds**

- **Collars**

- **Guard animals**

Livestock guard dogs (LGD's), llamas, alpacas, donkeys, ostriches, black-wildebeest, etc. In cases where farmers do not have the time or are reluctant to invest time and effort in the training and development of LGD's, the use of this method often fails. However, the effectiveness may be increased by combining the use of LGD's with shepherds.

Because caracals are shy animals and active mainly at night, using species that are active by day may not be very effective at guarding livestock against

caracal. Also, because caracals stalk their prey when hunting, a guard animal may not be aware of the presence of the caracal until it is too late.

- **Farm and livestock management practices**

Healthy veld usually contains various species of small mammals – caracals' preferred prey. Overgrazing leads to lower prey numbers, which may drive caracals to start preying on livestock. The risk of caracal killing livestock also increases during winter or drought periods, when natural prey numbers are low. The risk further increase if these periods overlap with the lambing season and/or the time when caracals have their own young, and/or when livestock spend more time in habitat preferred by caracal. The following may help reduce predation risk by caracal.

- Selective grazing – avoiding grazing in preferred caracal habitat during times when natural prey numbers are likely to be low or during lambing seasons.

- Regulation of livestock breeding (adapting lambing seasons so that they do not overlap with periods when natural prey is scarce).

- Where practical, lambing in kraals or pastures with predator-proof fencing, or close to the homestead.

- Keep regular and accurate records of livestock numbers.

Predator control:

- **Foothold traps**

Selectivity can be increased by adjusting the pan tension according to the average weight of an adult caracal.

- **Call-and-shoot**

- **Cage traps**

Although caracal can be caught in a cage trap relatively easily, setting the cage trap using a caracal kill may not be effective in areas with high human activity or high

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hunting pressure. In such areas, caracals rarely return to feed on the carcass a second time. Cage traps can be selective in the sense that non-target animals can be released. But non-target animals are also easily caught in a cage trap, rendering the trap useless for catching the caracal.

- *Hunting with hounds*

Historically, well-trained packs of hounds operating in ideal conditions were considered the most effective method for controlling caracal. It is a costly method and should only be used when fresh caracal scent can be picked up close to a freshly killed carcass. In areas with high human activity or high hunting pressure, caracals may limit their activity during the day, becoming more active at night, which would limit the usefulness of hounds.

- *Livestock Protection Collars (LPC's)*

Only caracal that prey on sheep and goats are targeted. Therefore, the risk of secondary poisoning and environmental contamination is lower compared to other methods of poisoning. LPC's are easy to use and cheaper than most other methods, but may be less effective in extensive grazing areas.

Foothold traps and cage traps are costly methods and it takes time to achieve success. If no caracals have been caught after a period of one month, the capture device should be moved to a different location. But if the costs of these methods outweigh the cost of livestock losses, the use of these methods are not justified.

To save on labour and transport costs, and to ensure higher selectivity, control should be conducted in the shortest possible time and should cease once the culprit has been caught.

The effectiveness of trapping devices such as foothold traps and cage traps can be increased by:

- Setting them in the area where the damage was caused and covering different routes leading to the site of damage.
- Determining the number of capture devices to be set and area to be covered with caracal density and home range size in the various veld types in mind. For example, more devices should be set in fynbos than in karoo or in valley bushveld.
- Not setting capture devices in areas where other caracal control methods are used that are incompatible with capture devices (for example, hounds and night shooting).

There is no single known method to solve problems with caracal predating on livestock. Different methods or combinations of methods may be needed in different areas or during different seasons.

Several studies have shown that there are caracals on farmland that do not prey on sheep. Monitoring predator presence on the farm is recommended and try to remove only individuals that cause damage. Territorial caracals ensure that non-territorial (often damage-causing) caracals do not spend much time in the area. This may reduce predation on livestock in the long term.

Legal aspects of caracal control

In the Western Cape, landowners require a permit to kill caracal. Permits are not issued for control methods such as hunting with helicopters and foothold traps, however. In the other provinces, a permit is required to hunt at night and for the use of a helicopter. Landowners in the North West also need permits to hunt caracal, but in the Free State and KZN, landowners do not need a permit to hunt caracal on their own property.

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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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