

Series: 2-008/2

CARACAL HUNTING TECHNIQUE/FEEDING SIGNS

Livestock predation by caracal

Predation on livestock by caracals usually peaks during dry and/or cold conditions (winter months or during droughts) when natural prey (such as rodents) densities are low. In some areas, this is also the lambing season for small livestock.

Livestock of all ages and sizes are killed. With larger prey such as antelope or small livestock, a caracal may return to the kill for a second feeding (See Series: 02-003/2 – Feeding ecology of the caracal).

When a caracal preys on sheep, it usually only kills one, but in some cases, it may kill more than one. In cases where a caracal kills more than one sheep during a hunt, it usually only feeds on one sheep.

Hunting technique

Caracals hunt alone. A caracal stalks its prey at short range. Then, after a powerful rush, it pounces directly onto the prey or brings it down with a sideswipe of the forepaw. With larger prey, the caracal falls to the ground and claws at it with its hindfeet if the animal was not killed with the initial bite.

It kills prey with a bite at the underside of the throat to smother it, or at the nape of the neck.

With small prey such as rodents, caracals start by eating the head.

It may be difficult to distinguish between the bite of a caracal and that of a black-backed jackal on a sheep, goat or antelope carcass. Therefore, the position of the bite wounds on the carcass, and feeding patterns should also be considered to identify a caracal kill.

Signs that a caracal was responsible for killing the animal, include:

- Bite marks: with a throat bite, two puncture wounds is usually visible on either side of the throat; or, with a bite at the back of the neck, two small punctures on either side of the spine.
- Claw marks are often visible on the shoulder, belly or hindquarters of a prey animal.
- The puncture wounds where the caracal delivered the killing bite are deeper than those made by black-backed jackals.
- The absence of the spoor of other predators at a fresh kill.
- Bruising around the bitten areas (indicating that the animal was alive when attacked).

Feeding signs

Caracals have a characteristic feeding pattern. Signs that a caracal fed on the carcass, include:

- Wool or hair is plucked out.
- The point of entry into the carcass is chewed off (there is no loose flap of skin, as in the case of the black-backed jackal – see Series: 1-008/1 - Black-backed jackal hunting technique and feeding signs).
- The back and inside of the hind leg is usually eaten.
- Sometimes, the brisket and shoulder are also eaten.
- The stomach and intestines are not eaten
- Caracals do not break or chew on bones.
- The remains of the prey may be covered with vegetation debris or soil, or may be

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dragged to cover (e.g. under a bush) or hidden on lower branches of trees.

- If it does return to the carcass, it will eat mainly soft meat (for example, shoulder).

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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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