

Series: 3-002/1

HUNTING TECHNIQUE AND FEEDING SIGNS OF DOMESTIC DOGS

Domestic dogs do not have preferences for specific types or age classes of livestock. Therefore, they may attack sheep, goats, cattle and sometimes even horses of any age and size. Attacks are not seasonal, as is the case with most wild predator species, and can occur throughout the year.

Unlike black-backed jackals, dogs often kill or injure more than one animal in an attack, especially if they run in packs.

Sometimes, dogs kill the livestock but do not eat from the carcass. When they do eat meat from the livestock, the amount eaten is usually more than a jackal or caracal would eat.

Signs that dogs were responsible for the kill:

- The kill is usually very messy, unlike the clean, neat kill of a wild predator.
- Wool, skin and intestines are scattered everywhere (not like the neat plucking of wool as is the case with caracal).
- Large tooth marks. Distance between the puncture wounds made by the upper canines: 28 – 58 mm



These sheep have been bitten on various parts of the body. Note the wool scattered in the background (left), and the wounds where chunks of meat were torn from the hindquarters (right). Photographs courtesy of A. Strauss.

Dogs like to chase prey, biting and tearing randomly at the animal while running alongside it. Therefore, the scene is usually littered with dog spoor/tracks, and the animals that were attacked may have bitemarks anywhere on the body. The tendency of dogs to repeatedly bite the prey and attempt to shake it, results in severe bleeding at the site of the bite wounds.

Very small lambs may be bitten across the chest, back, head, or neck. Where young lambs are bitten on the neck, the bones in the neck are usually broken. Large sheep are usually caught by the back legs.



Lamb killed by domestic dogs. Unlike the typical feeding pattern of black-backed jackal and caracal, the dogs started feeding on the lamb's back. Photograph taken by JN Gunter

Signs that dogs fed on the carcass:

- The carcass is sometimes dragged to and fro.
- No scratch marks will be visible on the carcass.
- When a kill is eaten, there is no feeding pattern, although feeding on the hindquarters is common.
- Large pieces of skin and meat may also be ripped from other parts of the carcass.
- Bones may be chewed or eaten.
- Intestines are sometimes eaten.

The way some dogs kill and eat their prey is very similar to the killing and feeding patterns of black-backed jackals or, in some cases, caracals. So on the surface, it may look like a black-backed jackal or a caracal may have caused the damage. But skinning the carcass may reveal the size of the bites, the location of bites on other parts of the carcass, and the severity of bleeding and bruising under the skin at these sites. Therefore, it is advisable to skin the carcass to investigate whether the damage was caused by dogs or wild predators.



Carefully skinning the carcass in the area where bite marks are visible (left: dark spots, indicating the animal was killed by dogs and not scavenged) is very useful in identifying the type of animal responsible for the damage. Measuring the distance between the puncture wounds caused by the maxilla or upper canine teeth (right) can even confirm the dog breed involved. In this case, the sheep was attacked by a large dog breed (Siberian husky –distance between puncture wounds of the upper canines: 42 mm). Photographs courtesy of A. Strauss.

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