

Short Communication

An analysis of faecal pellets of the brown hyaena on the Namib coast

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An analysis of faecal pellets of the brown hyaena on the Namib coast showed that Cape fur seals and seabirds constitute a major portion of the diet of this animal.

'n Analise van die mis van die bruin hiëna langs die Namibkus het getoon dat Kaapse pelsrobbe en seevoëls die grootste gedeelte van die dieet van hierdie dier uitmaak.

The geographical range of the brown hyaena (*Hyaena brunnea*) includes the western seaboard of southern Africa (Skinner & van Aarde 1981). Within their home ranges, small groups of brown hyaenas have communal latrines containing accumulations of faeces (Mills, Gorman & Mills 1980; Skinner & van Aarde 1981).

In December 1977, I collected a total of 120 faecal pellets at three latrines of brown hyaenas near Bogenfels, on the Namibian coast, approximately 70 km south of Lüderitzbucht (26°38'S/15°09'E). All but two of the pellets contained remains of Cape fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*), in the form of skin, hair, tooth and other bone material (Table 1). Based on the teeth, bones (mainly phalanges) and colour of the hair of *A. pusillus*, 60% of the pellets contained remains of sub-adult seals. Hair from mammals other than *A. pusillus* was found in four pellets, and probably belonged to rodents in three

Table 1 Frequency of occurrence of food remains in 120 faecal pellets of brown hyaenas at Bogenfels

Food item	Number of pellets
Cape fur seal	118
Hair	95
Skin and hair	18
Bone	79
Teeth	18
Gerbil	3
Hair	3
Other mammals	1
Hair	1
Jackass penguin	22
Feathers	22
Bone	2
Cormorants (<i>Phalacrocorax</i> spp.)	10
Feathers	9
Bone	1
Kelp gull (<i>Larus dominicanus</i>)	4
Feathers	4
Other birds (probably seabirds)	4
Feathers	4

of these pellets. Feather and bone material derived from seabirds, primarily the jackass penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*), occurred in 40 pellets (Table 1). Traces of plant material were present in three pellets.

These findings confirm the importance of marine mammals (Skinner & van Aarde 1981) and seabirds in the diet of the brown hyaena on the western seaboard of southern Africa.

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References

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