

Feeding habits and preferences of southern gelada (*Theropithecus gelada obscurus*, Heuglin 1863) in Abune Yosef Zigit Community Conservation Area, northern Ethiopia

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Abstract

The feeding habits and preferences of gelada has been studied in different parts of Ethiopia. However, still the diet composition and preferences of the species is poorly understood because of diet composition and preference variations among its ranges. Therefore, this study is aimed at investigating the diet composition and preferences of southern gelada in remote unexplored Abune Yosef Zigit Community Conservation Area. Diet composition was assessed by instantaneous scan sampling within a 10-minute interval lasting for 5-minutes and feeding preferences by systematic random sampling. The data was collected for two seasons: the dry season (February 2021 to April 2021) and the wet season (June 2021 to August 2021). Sorenson's similarity index was used to compute diet similarity during both seasons. The result revealed that a mean total of 22 plants, 3 insect species and unidentified tubers were consumed by southern gelada. An average of 55.11% forbs, 41.71% graminoids, 1.61% insects and 1.59% unidentified tubers were consumed by southern gelada. The top two preferred fodder species were *Festuca richardii* (12.55%) and *Rumex nepalensis* (10.80%). Southern gelada feeding preference is significantly influenced by plant availability and utilization frequency ($P[?]0.05$). *Festuca recharidii* is the most desired diet for gelada, and plantation should be supported to increase its availability.

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