

Carrion in bomas: multiple observations of cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) scavenging events and potential causes in managed populations

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Abstract

Facultative scavenging can be observed across a large range of carnivorous mammals, but is an uncommon behavioural trait in cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*). Very few incidents of cheetahs scavenging have been reported, with no explanation given as to why it may occur. In this paper we provide three more observations of cheetahs scavenging between 2019 and 2023 in three different protected areas in South Africa and Malawi. We suggest a common factor between these observations, namely that all adult individuals involved were temporarily housed in holding enclosures (bomas) during relocation processes and were provisioned with carrion as supplemental feed. The observed scavenging events could also have been influenced by the easy access of food in a situation where food acquisition was potentially difficult (i.e. old age, loss of hunting partner, mother with cubs). We hypothesise that these contributing factors, combined with the prior exposure of the adult individuals to eating carrion, could be a potential explanation for our observations of cheetahs scavenging. These observations provide a basis for further research into cheetah scavenging behaviour and the potential impacts of translocations that require prolonged holding periods on wildlife behaviour post-release. Understanding these behavioural shifts is crucial for cheetah conservation, as successful reintroduction efforts depend on the ability of cheetahs to adapt to new environments and food acquisition strategies.

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