Scat Based Dietary Analysis of Beaver Hills Canids

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Poster Presentation Abstract:

Recently, the Cooking Lake Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area (BPRA), has been recolonized by wolves, an apex predator. The potential inclusion of domestic ungulates into the wolf diet through depredation events poses concerns for the local grazing community. Additionally, the arrival of an apex predator may have trophic consequences for the coyote, the current top predator in the BPRA. The diet of canids in the BPRA is being determined using scat analysis. A small sample of each collected scat is cleaned with acetone to isolate twenty representative hairs and/or presence of other food for identification. During the summer season, results indicate that canid diet is primarily composed of insects, berries, and small mammals. A comparison of the girth and composition of canid scat suggests that as scat diameter increases the likelihood of the scat containing large mammals and plants increases, as does the likelihood of a given scat being from a wolf. Smaller scats were found to contain more insects and small mammals. These results suggest that, during the summer of 2015, domestic ungulates play a very small role in the diet of canids, an observation confirmed by the grazing association as only one calf was depredated. The results also suggest that the recolonizing and resident canids are currently competing in terms of diet but that as the wolf population increases we expect to see a divergence in diet due to resource partitioning. Further genetic work to confirm the species of scat is ongoing.

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