

ASPECTS OF THE ECOLOGY OF THE SERVAL
LEPTAILURUS SERVAL
IN THE NGORONGORO CRATER, TANZANIA

by

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted of the serval, *Leptailurus serval*, in the mainly open grassland and marsh habitat of the Ngorongoro Crater. The aim was to collect information on serval distribution, density, ranging patterns, feeding habits and social interactions. During a 4-year period 12 individuals habituated to the observer were followed and quantitative data collected.

Adult males and females were found to occupy over several years the same individual home ranges, extending over at least about 10 km², with relatively little overlap. Within each range one or two 'core areas' could be recognized in which the occupant of the range was most frequently sighted. When reaching adolescence young servals are expelled from their mother's range and roam about until they manage to establish a range for themselves. Ranges are claimed by means of recurrent marking behaviour.

Data are presented on usage of the range and particularly on the hunting techniques and the kinds of prey taken. In addition to prey, grasses were regularly eaten. Data on food were collected by following and watching the servals as well as by faecal analysis.

The data allow a comparison of the time spent on different activities and give a representative picture of the course of activity round the clock and over the seasons.

CONTENTS

PART I. DISTRIBUTION, DENSITY AND ACTIVITY PATTERNS

Introduction	528
Study area	529
Study methods	531
Results	533
Distribution	533
Marking	549
Activity budget	555
Social interactions	561

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Discussion.....	567
Habitat preference	567
Density and range	567
Marking behaviour	571
Activity budget	573
Summary.....	575

PART II. HUNTING AND FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

Introduction	576
Study area	576
Study methods	576
Results.....	578
Hunting, killing and feeding behaviour	578
Diel and seasonal course of hunting activity	587
Energetics of hunting activity	588
Hunting success	590
Diet and consumption	592
Faecal analysis	594
Comparison of methods	597
Discussion.....	597
Summary.....	606
Acknowledgements.....	607
References	608

PART I. DISTRIBUTION, DENSITY AND ACTIVITY PATTERNS

INTRODUCTION

The smaller African felids have received little attention, possibly due to their solitary and shy nature and their supposed tendency to be nocturnal. Hence very little is known about their behaviour in the wild. Most of the present knowledge comes from incidental sightings from various parts of the African continent and needs to be substantiated. Recent short-term observations of the serval in the Serengeti-Ndutu woodland and plains area in Tanzania, showed that servals could be readily observed and followed even during the day (GEERTSEMA, 1976). This paper, which is part of a study dealing with several aspects of serval ecology and behaviour, presents data on the distribution, density, range and marking behaviour and some other activities of the serval in the Ngorongoro Crater in northern Tanzania.

Restricted to the African continent, the serval is absent from the Sahara and the other desert areas of Somalia and South West Africa, and from the equatorial tropical forests of West and Central Africa. The serval has been exterminated at the borders of its range in both North and South Africa, but elsewhere it has managed to maintain itself in most of its range (SMITHERS, 1978).