

# Observation of Indian Wolf Pack Feeding on Goat Carcasses along National Highway 7

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The Indian wolf, *Canis lupus pallipes* is a large predator of the Indian subcontinent and is widespread in forested and human-dominated landscapes. The canid alternates between wild and domestic prey with changes in habitats and is known to thrive in human-dominated landscapes. We report an observation of a pack of three wolves scavenging on goat carcasses on the verge of the busy National Highway 7, an arterial highway in India. Though wolves are known to be scavengers of cattle and livestock carcasses in human-dominated landscapes, such encounters near high-speed and traffic roads could be potentially fatal to wolves in human-dominated landscapes.

The Indian wolf is a canid ranging over much of India and is categorised as Least Concern (LC) by the IUCN. It is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, along with the Indian national animal, the tiger. It extensively uses areas along the periphery of protected forests and prefers scrubland, grasslands and semi-arid pastoral/agricultural areas. Wolves are known to approach human dwellings but prefer habitat pockets with visual cover and shade during the day. In landscapes with a good prey base, wild prey can form up to 75% of the wolves' diet, with 21% of feeding events consisting of scavenging on domestic cattle carcasses. Conversely, in areas with low natural prey populations, a large proportion of wolves' diets (ranging from 63 - 100%) comprises domestic prey.

We report an incident that occurred in the early morning (6 a.m.) of 10 November 2017, where a pack of three wolves was observed scavenging on garbage and livestock carcasses on National Highway 7 near Pench National Park and Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India.

The traffic in the morning was light, comprising only a few trucks and the odd cyclist. We found the three wolves wandering about the edges of the highway, occasionally crossing the highway whenever the traffic subsided. The three wolves found a small pile of garbage on the side of the highway and spent about 2-3 minutes rummaging through the plastic and paper waste. After a while, with little to no success finding food, they split into two groups and continued their journey along the highway. One of the wolves found a goat carcass lying on the roadside and managed to drag it towards the forest edge before finally disappearing into the thickets within a few minutes.

The other two wolves chanced upon another goat carcass lying about 6 m from the road, a little ahead of the former. One of the wolves immediately started tearing at the carcass while another seemed to keep guard. After a while, the wolf that was keeping watch went back into the forest. The first wolf, however, continued feasting for another half hour before it, too, decided to return to the woods, but it failed to drag the carcass with it. The entire observation lasted about 45 minutes.

One of the authors was part of a team that surveyed this road stretch in 2015 when they came across a similar instance of a wolf feeding on discarded chicken waste that seemed to have been disposed of by a poultry shop. These incidents reveal yet another impact of roads on wildlife. Provision of carcasses along the roadsides, often thrown by vehicles transporting livestock, could lead to an 'ecological trap' like a situation where the roadsides may become an easy place to find food for the wolves. Additional food resources originating from the road could be roadkill for wild animals. Even though wolves are accustomed to living in human-dominated landscapes, such provisioning of food near high-traffic highways could heighten the risk of fatalities due to collisions with vehicles.

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"A pack of three Indian wolves exploring the National Highway 7 during early morning hours" © Adrian Lyngdoh



"A pack of Indian wolves scavenging on garbage on the verge of National Highway 7, central India" © Adrian Lyngdoh



"An Indian wolf feeds on a discarded goat carcass as another keeps watch" © Adrian Lyngdoh



"A wolf trying to pull the goat carcass towards the forest" © Adrian Lyngdoh