

# Major study on livestock predation

SA livestock owners lose vast sums to predation, but control is often inefficient and has negative side-effects. Now research on more effective, environmentally friendly methods is under way.

**P**redation of livestock in South Africa has been estimated to cost in excess of R1 billion in losses each year, and has complex social, economic and ecological drivers and consequences.

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, through the Centre for African Conservation Ecology, is currently undertaking a major scientific assessment on livestock predation in the country. The university is working with the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (through the Red Meat Research Development Planning Committee), Cape Wools, and the SA Mohair Growers' Association.

Approximately R2,5 million had been set aside for the project – PredSA – which started in May 2016 and is expected to continue for another year. Care has been taken to ensure that the assessment is legitimate, salient, credible, transparent and broadly participatory.

## HOW THE ASSESSMENT WORKS

For the project, livestock has been broadly defined as domesticated animals and wildlife (the former excluding poultry and the latter including ostrich in free- or semi-free ranging environments).

Conflict between livestock producers and predators, and attempts to manage it, have persisted for over 350 years. The result has been the eradication of the majority of apex predators across much of South Africa. Knowing the role players is key to managing them. As black-

backed jackal and caracal make up the majority of livestock predators, PredSA is researching the species to understand their roles as livestock predators.

Although black-backed jackal and caracal are heavily persecuted in South Africa, there is a lack of clear understanding of the ecosystem-level consequences this may have, as both species vary in their roles in food chains. PredSA is reviewing the functional role of black-backed jackal and caracal across a range of landscapes, from those that have apex predators to those dominated by humans and livestock.

Other species are also implicated in livestock predation. These include lion, leopard, cheetah, Cape fox, African wild dog, side-striped jackal, spotted hyena, brown hyena, serval, baboon, honey badger, bushpig, crocodile, feral domestic dogs, and birds of prey.

PredSA will collect evidence of attacks by predators, identify which livestock is attacked, and categorise the severity of the predation.

The information collected will be evaluated and the ecology and behaviour of the main livestock predators will be reviewed to determine how these affect their interaction with livestock.

## CURRENT PREDATION CONTROL METHODS

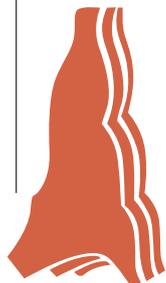
Predation management has always focused on lethal control or excluding the problem species from a specific area. But emerging evidence suggests that not all predators are problem animals, and that territorial individuals may help to exclude potential problem individuals.

Public opinion is against lethal control, while insights have been gained into the environmental effects of such control. There is now a move towards non-lethal control methods, and targeting only individual predators.

These interventions, their efficacy, and trends in their application will be analysed and presented in a relevant framework once the assessment is complete.

• RPO on 012 349 1102/1103 or email [rpo@lantic.net](mailto:rpo@lantic.net).

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
The black-backed jackal is a notorious livestock predator, but its role in the food chain is being investigated by PredSA.  
FW ARCHIVE



**RPO**

This page is sponsored  
by the red meat industry

