



short communication/kratko priopćenje

## GOLDEN JACKALS (*CANIS AUREUS* L.) ON THE PELJEŠAC PENINSULA (SOUTHERN DALMATIA, CROATIA)

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The article presents the results from the jackal survey on Pelješac Peninsula. Presence of jackals was confirmed on most parts of the peninsula, with most recordings in the central part. Scat content revealed diverse food composition of jackals.

**Key words:** golden jackal, *Canis aureus*, Canidae, Pelješac

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Rad donosi rezultate istraživanja čagljeva na poluotoku Pelješcu. Prisutnost čagljeva potvrđena je na većem dijelu poluotoka, a najviše ih je zabilježeno u središnjem dijelu. Sadržaj izmeta pokazuje raznolik sastav ishrane čagljeva.

**Ključne riječi:** čagalj, *Canis aureus*, Canidae, Pelješac

### INTRODUCTION

In most of Europe golden jackals (*Canis aureus*) occur in small and scattered populations, mainly along the sea coasts of the Balkan Peninsula (KRYŠTUFEK *et al.*, 1997). For many areas in Europe the status of jackal population is poorly known (GIANNATOS, 2004), and except for Greece no good data on densities exist.

Along the Dalmatian coast a rapid expansion of the species took place in the 20th century and after 1980 jackals also established permanent territories in Istria (KRYŠTUFEK & TVRTKOVIĆ, 1990). From the Pelješac Peninsula the presence of jackals was mentioned in the literature for the first time in the 19th century and they are known to be present here ever since (KRYŠTUFEK & TVRTKOVIĆ, 1990). In the recent

years the number of jackals on the peninsula was somewhat decreased after temporary higher hunting pressure (D. DENAC, pers. comm.), however, there are no accurate data on their present distribution.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The survey took place on the Pelješac Peninsula (42°45'–43°00' N, 17°00'–17°50' E) in southern Dalmatia, Croatia, between 22nd and 29th of April 2006. To determine distribution of jackals on the peninsula, several spotlight surveys were conducted during the evening and night hours. While slowly driving through the local roads we used high intensity spotlight (2,000,000 candle power) to locate individual animals.



**Fig. 1.** Footprint of golden jackal in the vicinity of Žuljana (photo: M. Krofel).

In total, approximately 15 hours of spotlight surveying was conducted. Additional data on jackal distribution were obtained with the documentation of other signs of their presence, i. e. vocalization, footprints (Fig. 1), and scats. Geographical coordinates and altitude of locations were recorded by GPS.

## RESULTS

Presence of jackals was documented on 17 locations (Fig. 2). Jackals were found in the maquis, pine forests, olive plantations, vineyards, on paved and unpaved roads, near streams, and in the vicinity of settlements. We recorded them between



Fig. 2. Localities with documented presence of golden jackals on Pelješac Peninsula.

18 and 287 meters above sea level. All our direct observations of jackals were of single animals. Among them we also noticed a pregnant female in the late phase of gestation.

In addition we examined the content of 4 jackal scats found in the field. Scats included mammal hairs, parts of exoskeleton from arthropods, seeds from different plant species and other plant material.

## DISCUSSION

Data show that jackals are present throughout the peninsula. It should be noted, that high number of records in the vicinity of Žuljana is due to higher intensity of vocalization monitoring in this area and may not necessarily reflect higher densities of jackals. Although golden jackals usually live in pairs or larger family groups (JHALA & MOEHLMAN, 2004), all of our direct observations were of single animals. Probably other individuals were often present nearby, but we were not able to see them due to dense vegetation. The date of the observation of female in late phase of gestation (25th of April) coincides with the breeding and birth dates reported in the literature for this region (BRANCELJ, 1988).

The inspection of scats has again confirmed the omnivorous nature of golden jackals, reported also from other regions (LANSZKI & HELTAI, 2002; JHALA & MOEHLMAN, 2004).

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