

## Diet of the Crab-eating fox *Cerdocyon thous* (Carnivora: Canidae) in the Páramo de Belmira, Antioquia, Colombia

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The Crab-eating fox *Cerdocyon thous*, one of the six canids occurring in Colombia (Alberico *et al.* 2000), is a widespread species that inhabits savannas and woodlands from Panama (Tejera-N. *et al.* 1999) to northern Argentina (Medel & Jaksic 1988). The diet of *C. thous* has been studied in more detail in the lowlands (Bisbal & Ojasti 1980, Brady 1979, Cordero-Rodríguez & Nassar-H. 1999, Facure & Monteiro-Filho 1996, Martínez 1996, Martínez & Cadena 2000, Montgomery & Lubin 1978, Maffei & Taber 2003) but limited information is available from Andes, where only one study was done, in montane forest (Delgado-V. 2000). Our aim herein is to provide for first time information on the diet of *C. thous* in a Colombian Paramo. Although the available sample is small, the paucity of information of the diet of this species in Andes makes this information valuable.

Belmira (Departamento de Antioquia) is a municipality in the Colombian Central Cordillera, Ca. 6-8 Km N Belmira is the Paramo of Belmira (6°38' N, 75°40' W) where vegetation is dominated by *Espeletia* and *Puya* (Corantioquia 2004). Scats were collected during sporadic visits 20 May 2002, 23 June 2002, 10 July 2002, and 7 October 2003, from 3145 - 3210 m a.s.l. Scats were dried at room temperature and contents were separated by hand. Vertebrate remains were separated into hair, skull and postcranial fragments, teeth, osteological bird material, and seeds. The remains were identified, when possible, at different taxonomic levels ranging from order to species, depending on the type and quality of the sample and the availability of reference material. The minimum number of individuals (see Simonneti *et al.* 1984) was determined for each food category. To avoid the possibility of overestimating abundance, the total number of mammals was determined according

to the number of skulls, but jaws and post-cranial fragments were only used to aid in identification. Material recovered from scat remains were deposited in the Colección Teriológica Universidad de Antioquia (CTUA).

We counted 24 prey items (23 vertebrates and 1 vegetal remain) in 16 scats (Table 1). *C. thous* feeds almost exclusively on mammals, where rodents were the most common prey item (58.31%), followed by insectivores (20.83%). Other vertebrate prey such as shrew opossums, opossums, lagomorphs and birds were present in lower proportions. The only one non-vertebrate item found were seeds. Insects and frogs previously found in *C. thous* diet in montane forests (Delgado-V. 2002) were not found in this study. *Thomasomys* spp., the more abundant rodent in the diet (Berta 1982, Bisbal & Ojasti 1980, Brady 1979, Montgomery & Lubin 1978), represents an important prey in montane forests and Paramo (Delgado-V. 2002). While the echimyid arboreal rat, *Olallamys albicauda* (Delgado-V. & Zurc, 2005), and the squirrel, *Microsciurus* sp., recovered in scats analyzed previously in montane forests (Delgado-V. 2002) and now in Paramo, represent sporadic prey, possibly due to their arboreal habits. Similar to the situation in montane forests (Delgado-V. 2002), *Cryptotis* represents the most abundant non-rodent prey item in the Andes. *Caenolestes* and small mouse opossums occurred minimally, concordant with findings in montane forest (Delgado-V. 2002). On the other hand, *Sylvilagus* represents a new diet record of this canid in Andes. Low representation of insects and absence of fruits is a possible artifact of the limited sample size. For this reason, systematic collections of Andean *Cerdocyon* scats are necessary in order to document more comprehensive aspects year-round diet.

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**Table 1.** Prey items in 16 scats of Crab-eating fox *Cerdocoyon thous*. N = the minimum number of individuals in each prey category. Percentages (%) were calculated considering the total number of prey.

Prey items	N	%
Paucituberculata		
<i>Caenolestes cf. fuliginosus</i>	1	4.16
Didelphimorphia		
Small opossum unidentified	1	4.16
Soricomorpha		
<i>Cryptotis cf. medellinia</i>	5	20.83
Rodentia		
<i>Microsciurus</i> sp.	1	4.16
<i>Thomasomys</i> sp.	3	12.50
<i>Thomasomys</i> gr. <i>aureus</i>	4	16.66
Murid unidentified	5	20.83
<i>Olallamys albicauda</i>	1	4.16
Lagomorpha		
<i>Sylvilagus</i> sp.	1	4.16
Passeriformes unidentified	1	4.16
Seeds	1	4.16