

A NOTE ON THE FOOD OF FERAL PIGS (*SUS SCROFA*) OF AUCKLAND ISLAND

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While studying the population of feral goats (*Capra hircus* L.) on the northern tip of main Auckland Island in summer 1972-73 (Rudge and Campbell, 1975) skeletons were looked for from which to estimate natural mortality. We found only two skulls, both without horns or lower jaws, and concluded that goat bodies were eaten by feral pigs. Some pig faeces were therefore collected around Port Ross, preserved in 10% formalin, and later washed apart on a 1 mm sieve. Identifiable items were listed as present or absent and scored by percent frequency of occurrence. No goat remains were found but the other contents supplemented the only previous note, which came from examining the stomachs of 16 pigs shot during the same expedition (Challies, 1975).

All faeces contained more than one food item and most contained inert material such as pebbles, lumps of wood, and peat (Table 1).

Tussock grasses (*Poa litorosa* and *Chionochloa antarctica*) and fine leaved grass occurred in all faeces. In five, virtually the whole faecal mass was a ball of coarse chaff with pieces of lamina up to 20 cm long. In the remainder, the grass remains were basal parts of tussocks 2-3 cm long.

Peat mud, fibrous roots, tussock bases, and the tanned leaves and seed cases of *Dracophyllum* and *rata* occurred in 54% of the faeces. A fleshy root mass was found only once.

Animal remains occurred in 11 (85%) of faeces. They would have come directly from the shore in the two faeces containing seaweed and amphipods; but probably from the regurgitations of sealions (*Neophoca hookeri*) in the two with echinoid tests and cephalopod beaks. Feathers of the Antarctic prion (*Pachyptila desolata*) indicated scavenging or predation in the four cases when they were associated with flesh and bone. In four others they might have been ingested incidentally during rooting because loose feathers were common on the ground.

The pig hair was attached to skin and accompanied by bone and was therefore unlikely to have come from grooming activity.

Although faeces had been subjected to more digestion than stomach contents, they still contributed pertinent qualitative information on diet and feeding behaviour. This sample supported the quantitative results of Challies (1975) and added interesting items such as cat and pig remains. Although they contained much evidence of rooting activity there were no earthworm remains such as chitinous setae. Challies found worms in all stomachs from the highland, and in one of eight from the coast.

All the vertebrate remains have been attributed to scavenging, but prions at least could have been taken by predation because pigs do excavate prion burrows (personal obs.) and presumably eat the occupants. Besides rooting, scavenging and predating, the pigs browsed on tussocks and possibly to a small extent on broadleaved shrubs. They also graze the *Rumex neglectus* swards of sandy shore lines, although it was not demonstrated by the faeces.

This small sample did not contain the goat remains

TABLE 1. Contents of thirteen faecal masses from pigs on Auckland Island.

Item	Frequency in thirteen faeces
Grasses	13
Roots	4
Stems of woody plants	2
<i>Myrsine divaricata</i>	9
<i>Dracophyllum longifolium</i>	8
<i>Metrosideros umbellata</i> (rata)	5
Ferns	3
<i>Cassinia vauvilliersii</i>	1
Pieces of wood	7
Bark	1
Stones	1
Peat	7
Feathers of <i>Pachyptila desolata</i>	8
Bones	5
Skin	5
Amphipods	2
Seaweed	2
Cephalopod beak	3
Echinoid test	1
Hair and skin of cat (<i>Felis catus</i>)	1
Skin and hairs of pig	1

we looked for, but the range of other animal parts found made it certain that dead goats would also be eaten when available. Sea lion remains were not identified in faeces either but their splintered bones were quite common on the shore lines.

REFERENCES

- CHALLIES, C. N. 1975. Feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*) on Auckland Island: status, and effects on vegetation and nesting sea birds. *N.Z. Journal of Zoology* 2 (4): 479-490.
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