

Wolves prefer to eat salmon, rather than hunt deer

Wolves prefer to eat fish rather than hunt, contradicting popular notions about their chasing deer and other hoofed animals for food, according to a latest research.

Chris Darimont of University of Victoria and the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, Canada, led a team of researchers who studied the feeding habits of wolves in a remote 3,300 sq. km. area of British Columbia.

Darimont informed that 'over the course of four years, we identified prey remains in wolf droppings and carried out chemical analysis of shed wolf hair in order to determine what the wolves like to eat at various times of year'.

For most of the year, the wolves tend to eat deer, as one would expect. During the autumn, however, salmon becomes available and the wolves shift their culinary preferences.

'One might expect that wolves would move onto salmon only if their mainstay deer were in short supply. Our data show that this is not the case, salmon availability clearly outperformed deer availability in predicting wolves' use of salmon,' the authors of the study said.

This work gives researchers as much insight into salmon ecology as wolf ecology. Darimont's mentor and co-author Thomas Reimchen, also of the University of Victoria, said 'Salmon continue to surprise us, showing us new ways in which their oceanic migrations eventually permeate entire terrestrial ecosystems.'

'In terms of providing food and nutrients to a whole food web, we like to think of them as North America's answer to the Serengeti's wildebeest'.

The authors explained that the wolves' taste for fishy fare is likely based on safety, nutrition and energetics. Darimont said: 'Selecting benign prey such as salmon makes sense from a safety point of view'.

'While hunting deer, wolves commonly incur serious and often fatal injuries. In addition to safety benefits we determined that salmon also provide enhanced nutrition in terms of fat and energy,' he added.

The study was published on Tuesday in the open access journal BMC Ecology.

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