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SCAVENGING OF A STRIPED SKUNK (*MEPHITIS MEPHITIS*) BY A  
RINGTAIL (*BASSARISCUS ASTUTUS*) IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Ringtails (*Bassariscus astutus*) are omnivorous and are known to prey upon mammals and birds (Poglayen-Neuwall and Toweill 1988). There is

limited information available, however, on their scavenging behavior, with evidence limited to scavenging on bats (Winkler and Adams 1972). Ringtail prey items commonly include arthropods and mammals, with the most common mammals being squirrels, rabbits, and rodents

(Taylor 1954; Toweill and Teer 1977; Poglayen-Neuwall and Toweill 1988; Alexander and others 1994; Stake and Cimprich 2003). In addition to natural food sources, Ringtails also occasionally use anthropogenic sources of food (Howard 1957; Lambert and Demarais 2001). Here, I report an observation of a Ringtail scavenging on a Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*).

On 12 February 2011, a road-killed Striped Skunk was found along Highway 162 in Mendocino National Forest, near the town of Elk Creek, California (UTM: Zone 10S, 552598E, 4388672N, WGS 84). The skunk carcass was fresh and in excellent condition, with the body entirely intact and its scent glands not having ruptured when it was hit by the vehicle. Its eyes were unclouded, suggesting it died that day. To document scavenging of the skunk carcass, I moved the carcass 350 m off the road into the forest and attached a motion-triggered camera trap (Cuddeback IR, De Pere, WI) on a nearby tree to record the fate of the carcass.

The skunk carcass was placed along a forested ridgeline dominated by Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), at an elevation of 1342 m. The understory of the forest was in 2 dichotomous sections. One section had been cleared by a fire crew approximately 3 y before, and there was very little regrowth; the other section had a thick understory of Greenleaf Manzanita (*Arcostaphylos patula*) that had not been cleared. The carcass was placed along the edge of the cleared and uncleared sections of undergrowth. The camera trap was placed 3 m from the carcass and programmed to take 30 s video clips when triggered by motion, with a delay of 1 min between recording events. I visited and downloaded data from the camera every 7 d.

The camera recorded 4 videos over the course of 20 d. A Ringtail discovered the carcass on 23 February 2011, and actively fed on the carcass for the duration of a 30 s video. Three days later, a Ringtail (possibly the same individual) fed on the carcass for the duration of a 30 s video. A video was taken on 27 February 2011 of a Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) at the carcass. The bear initially rolled on the carcass before taking a bite, which presumably punctured a scent gland, as it caused the bear to jump back in apparent alarm and run from the site. The last video was taken on 1 March 2011 of a Coyote (*Canis latrans*) investigating the remains of the

carcass but not feeding. The camera was removed on 2 March 2011 when there were few edible remains left to monitor.

Skunks are occasionally taken by a number of predators (Wade-Smith and Verts 1982), including Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*), Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), and Mountain Lions (*Puma concolor*). However, it is not believed that they are commonly eaten because they are not palatable to many species (Wade-Smith and Verts 1982). There are no previous records of Ringtail eating or scavenging skunks. This observation is among the first of a Ringtail scavenging a skunk, further demonstrating the wide flexibility in diet choice and opportunistic foraging behavior of Ringtails. DeVault and others (2003) point to the importance of scavenging in increasing individual fitness of some species, as well as its role in ecosystem regulation. The occurrence and extent of scavenging by Ringtails remains not well known, but it is not surprising that they may be willing to scavenge relatively large prey items when opportunities allow.

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