

RESPONSE OF RACCOON SPATIAL AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR TO THE PRESENCE OF AN EXPERIMENTALLY CLUMPED FOOD RESOURCE

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Abstract

In order to examine the effect of clumped resource patches on the transition from a solitary to a social or group-living lifestyle in a putatively solitary carnivore I contrasted raccoons inhabiting two adjacent sites on the University of Missouri Thomas S. Baskett Research and Education Area. I created a permanent feeding station where food was placed in clumped fashion while the other site received the food dispersed to multiple sites that varied over time. Radio telemetry data were analyzed to assess for differences between the sites. Home range size did not differ between treatments sites or genders, but raccoons from the clumped resource site were more likely to occur in the same geographic space. Communal denning, proximity of dens, and den reuse behaviors did not differ overall between the two sites, but clumped resource site raccoons moved shorter distances between subsequently used den sites and to utilize dens located within a smaller area. Differences in the patterns of overlap, co-occurrence, communal denning, proximal denning, and den reuse found in this study suggest that raccoons and perhaps other putatively solitary mesocarnivores are not truly solitary, but rather appear so only where resource availability induces territories occupied by just a single individual.