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Ecology, physiology and behaviour

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## An excursus on the role of wildlife carcasses

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Wildlife carcasses serve as biodiversity hotspots for soil bacteria and fungi, as well as for bacteria and fungi that inhabit or grow on the carcass itself (the necrobiome). They also play a vital role in supporting scavenging wildlife, particularly vulture species, which rely on the availability of carrion. Due to aesthetic and veterinary regulations, however, we rarely or never encounter carcasses in the wild. The rapid removal of carcasses naturally impacts biodiversity by disrupting food chains and reducing habitat complexity.

Examples from a vulture project in Namibia, as well as carcass research in Germany using exposed large vertebrate carcasses, provide insights into the significance of carcasses for scavenging wildlife, habitat parameters in the immediate vicinity of carcasses, and the effects on bird of prey populations, such as vultures. These studies highlight the essential role carcasses play not only in sustaining scavenger populations but also in shaping local biodiversity and ecological balance. Thus, rapid carcass removal can have significant ecological consequences. Future research and management should take into account the crucial role of carcasses in ecosystems to preserve biodiversity and support the health of scavenger species and their habitats.