

PREDATION BY THE TAYRA (*EIRA BARBARA*)

The tayra (*Eira barbara*) has been described as a polyphagous musteline (Ewer, 1973) which, in addition to eating invertebrates, honey, and fruit, preys on a variety of vertebrate species (Gaumer, 1917; Cabrera and Yepes, 1960; Villa, 1948; Alvarez del Toro, 1952). Tayras maintained in captivity by Brosset (*in* Ewer, 1973) and Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1965) accepted a wide variety of foods, including mushrooms, honey, milk, eggs, hamburger, ripe and rotten fruits of many kinds, alcoholic beverages, birds from sparrow- to duck-size, rodents as large as *Myocastor coypus*, reptiles (including a meter long colubrid snake), fish, and carrion.

There is, however, relatively little known of the food resource base exploited by wild tayras (Ewer, 1973). Enders (1935) found only fruit pulp and insect pupae (which may have been in the fruit) in the digestive tract of two specimens shot on Barro Colorado Island in Panama. Clark (*in* Enders, 1935) also found only vegetable matter in two tayras he examined, and a tayra shot by Villa (1948) contained nothing more than the fruits of coffee plants. Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1965) observed wild tayras eating fruit from Cecropia trees (*C. mexicana*) and mamey fruit (*Calocarpum mammosum*), and Galef and Clark (unpublished observation) saw a tayra taking fallen fruit of the Astrocaryum palm (*Astrocaryum standleyanum*) in addition to pieces of banana from a baiting site. In Surinam, Mittermeier observed a tayra feeding in the understory on the fruit of *Spondias mombin*.

Direct observation of predation or attempted predation by tayras are rare. Villa (1948) saw a tayra chase, but not catch, a *Mazama*. Skutch (1971) watched a tayra kill a nestling laughing falcon (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*). N. Smith (*in* Moynihan, 1970) observed a tayra carrying in its mouth a dead rufous-naped tamarin (*Saguinus oedipus geoffroyi*), and Hernandez-Camacho and Cooper (*in press*) report that a tayra was obtained while in rapid pursuit through trees of a troop of *Cebus appella*.

Below, we report four new field observations of predation or attempted predation by tayras. The prey species were an iguana (*Iguana iguana*), agoutis (*Dasyprocta punctata*), squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri sciureus*), and red-handed tamarins (*Saguinus midas midas*). Observations were made on Barro Colorado Island, Panama Canal Zone; on Isla Santa Sofia, a small island in the Amazon River about 30 kilometers upstream from Leticia, Amazonas, Colombia; and in Surinam.

On 1 September 1974 at 10:30 A.M. on a sunny day, a tayra and iguana were observed as they fell from a tree located in the Allee Creek ravine to the north of the laboratory clearing on Barro Colorado Island. A few seconds later, an adult female iguana (45.5 centimeters snout-vent length) came running by on the ground with a female tayra in pursuit. The tayra easily kept pace with the iguana during the 30 meter (15 second) chase. The iguana wedged itself under some fallen logs, concealing much of its body, but the tayra bit the iguana on the snout, inflicting puncture wounds, and severely mauled the iguana's right forelimb. The observer chased the tayra away so the iguana could be measured. The iguana was unresponsive to stimulation, but still alive. After the human observers retreated, the female tayra returned and dragged the iguana away. During the whole episode, a male tayra paced back and forth at about 10 m distance but did not join in the attack.

On 27 June 1974 at 8:50 A.M. at a spot some 200 m from the site of the iguana attack, a pair of tayras briefly chased twin four-day old agoutis. The young animals retreated to their nest hole and the tayras investigated the entrance until the mother agouti, which had been lying nearby, successfully chased them from the vicinity of the nest.

Attempted predation of squirrel monkeys was observed on Isla Santa Sofia, Colombia. On the nights of 25 and 26 September 1973, Bailey heard a group of squirrel monkeys giving

mobbing vocalizations from their sleeping tree, a palm of the genus *Mauritia* (Arecaceae). During the disturbance, the monkeys hung from the ends of the palm's fronds and gave frantic alarm calls, but no predation was observed. On the night of 28 September, a local resident of the island was attracted to the *Mauritia* palm by a similar series of vocalizations and killed a tayra as it descended from the tree. As the *Mauritia* was not in fruit, the presence of the tayra in the tree was probably the result of an attempt to prey on the squirrel monkeys. Bailey ascertained that in spite of these two probable attempts at predation by the tayra (which may or may not have been successful), the squirrel monkeys did not subsequently change sleeping sites. Thorington (1968) has also reported squirrel monkeys reacting with warning calls to the presence of the tayra.

The attempt of a tayra to prey on red-handed tamarins (*Saguinus midas midas*) was observed in Surinam (J. Jansen, personal communication, 1975). A tayra unsuccessfully chased a group of tamarins through the trees, moving at a slightly lower level in the canopy than the monkeys.

Tayras appear well suited to prey on a variety of vertebrate species. They are capable of rapid movement on the ground and are among the most arboreal mammalian predators, being able to pursue monkeys through the trees and to capture canopy-dwelling adult iguanas. The arboreal and occasional nocturnal activity of tayras make them a potential threat to sleeping diurnal tree-dwelling vertebrates. The interactions of tayras and primates reported both here and in the literature suggest that tayras may be important predators of small monkeys, such as the Callithricidae and small Cebidae, and may even prey upon some of the larger Cebidae.

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