



The Aardwolf is one of the largest insect-eating mammals of the sandveld areas of Southern Africa.

The Aardwolf: A Friend of the Farmer

by Dr. M. K. Seely, Director: Desert Ecological Research
Unit Gobabeb

D.R.F.N. : REPRINT
REFERENCE: 122
LIBRARY : WHK

THE secretive Aardwolf is actually a relatively common inhabitant of the eastern parts of the Namib Desert and it also occurs elsewhere in South West Africa. Because it is so circumspect in its habits it often goes unnoticed by all but the more careful observer. Living in burrows usually taken over from an antbear or some other digging animal, the Aardwolf is most commonly about only from dusk to dawn. During the daylight hours it normally stays alone — or perhaps several together — in the cool depth of its burrows.

The Aardwolf — *Proteles cristatus* to the scientists — is a peculiar mammal. It is categorized in a position somewhere between the civet and mongoose on one hand and the hyena on the other. When viewed superficially it resembles a striped hyena but is only as large as a small jackal. The teeth of the Aardwolf are noteworthy for being extremely degenerate. They are set wide apart and are very small and reduced in number. Also interesting

are the erectile hairs of the mane and tail which allow the Aardwolf — when excited — to look very much larger than its actual size.

Ecologically the Aardwolf plays an extremely important part in the sand veld areas of southern Africa. As has been observed in the Namib — and by others in Rhodesia and elsewhere — the Aardwolf eats almost exclusively termites. This diet is occasionally supplemented by beetles and other insects. Possibly they also consume decayed meat which is soft enough for their inferior dentition to handle but this plays a minor role in their overall diet. Therefore, in a balanced ecological situation the Aardwolf is a very important element in the control of termites — especially the large, juicy and nutritious harvester termites which are its very favourite food when available.

Although harvester termites are very important to the veld because their excavations help to keep the soil

aerated and allow rain to penetrate more freely, they may constitute a problem if too numerous. The Aardwolf is a very important aspect in the natural control of termite numbers. Although the Aardwolf is Protected Game in South West Africa, their protected status is often disregarded because their eating habits are misunderstood. This secretive and little known mammal should be protected and even encouraged so that it can carry out its normal function as daily consumer of enormous numbers of termites.

The Aardwolf thus provides the ultimate solution to the termite problem: Numerous termite excavations are allowed to exist contributing to soil fertility but the absolute number of termites in each colony is limited thus preventing decimation of available grazing. Besides being an anomalous and interesting mammal to the scientists, the Aardwolf is also very important to the farmers and its status as Protected Game in South West Africa should be carefully observed.

In the soil, the Harvester Termite is an important inhabitant. These creatures help to aerate the earth and allow greater water permeability while providing the most common food source for the Aardwolf.



Ladies!

ADORNMENT IS THE SPACE OF LIFE.
MAKES DREAMS COME TRUE.

The Latest Fashions for —

THE TRENDY TEENAGER,
THE YOUNG
AND THE MATURE MATRON

Await you at

ALMA MODEHUIS

WINDHOEK'S LEADING LADIES
FASHION SALON

2 Continental Buildings

Kaiser Street.

Phone 3-3428
2-8840

Box 1101

Ob hoch in den Wolken

oder auf den Wellen des Ozeans

Ihr freundliches

REISEBÜRO LUDWIG SCHRÖDER

Swakopmund

Postfach 882 — Telefon 4031

ist immer dabei!

Denken Sie daran — es macht uns Spass,
Sie über alles was man über das Reisen wissen muss, zu beraten.

Unter persönlicher Leitung von Herrn Alwin Hrabovsky.