

INVERTEBRATE DIET OF BREEDING AND NON-BREEDING CRESTED CARACARAS
(*CARACARA CHERIWAY*) IN FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT.--We compared the invertebrate component of the diet of breeding and nonbreeding northern Crested Caracaras (*Caracara cheriway*) during the breeding season, January through April, in Florida, using pellet analysis. Pellets from breeding adults were collected at active nests and pellets of nonbreeding caracaras were collected from beneath a communal roost. During the breeding season, breeding and nonbreeding caracaras consumed invertebrate prey from a minimum of 61 genera and a total of 33 families from eight orders. Nonbreeding caracaras consumed greater total numbers of invertebrates, more different prey types, and a greater diversity of invertebrates than did breeding caracaras. Pellets of nonbreeding caracaras contained more invertebrates per pellet, and carrion insects occurred more frequently in pellets of nonbreeding caracaras. Our findings suggest hypotheses regarding the possible role of intraspecific competition in the use of particular habitats and food resources by breeding and nonbreeding caracaras in Florida. Breeding pairs of caracaras are highly territorial and primarily feed nestlings larger-sized vertebrate prey, and field observations indicated that territorial adults can exclude young (nonbreeding) birds from their breeding areas; thus, diet differences may reflect social structure within this population. If pairs of breeding adults exclude conspecifics from important food resources or foraging habitats, nonbreeders may hunt arthropods or rely on carrion by necessity, especially if nonbreeders occur in suboptimal habitat in which other prey are less available.