

NOXIOUS MENU: CHEMICALLY PROTECTED INSECTS IN THE DIET OF THE  
NORTHERN CRESTED CARACARA (*CARACARA CHERIWAY*)

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ABSTRACT: Analysis of regurgitated pellets of *Caracara cheriway* at a site in south-central Florida produced a wide variety of insects and spiders from 34 families and at least 72 genera. Species identified occur in dung, at carrion, and in both aquatic and terrestrial habitats. A number are from taxa known to be chemically protected, and their consumption exposes caracaras to a broad diversity of chemical deterrents; for example, 1,4-benzoquinones, isoprenoids, carboxylic acids, esters, aldehydes, an alcohol, and ammonia. Other species identified in pellets indicate that caracaras likely experience other noxious substances such as those produced by species with dischargeable defensive glands (i.e., formic acid), plant-derived deterrents ejected when the insects are disturbed, and venom produced by those that sting (i.e., piperidine alkaloids). Consumption by caracaras of relatively large numbers of silphid beetles, which are commonly found at carcasses, suggests a long-term association between this raptor and these beetles. Our collection of pellets represents only part of one year and primarily the non-breeding season, therefore, the list of noxious chemicals ingested by these raptors with their insect food may be even more extensive than is now evident. Further analysis of more pellets and from breeding season months is warranted to obtain a more complete picture of this raptor's insect diet.