The popularity of the serval as a captive exotic pet has lead to the quest for information on how to properly feed them in order to optimize their genetic characteristics and their quality of life. Commercial frozen tubes of recycled animal parts; lips, udders, anuses, noses, intestinal tracts, and penises are randomly assembled for the sake of convenience to the animal caretaker and for the profitability of the diet producer. Equally as disturbing is the proliferation of a grain and animal by-product based diets that have been cooked or extruded beyond nutritional adequacy. Currently most of the commercial frozen and dry diets used by serval owners are absolutely foreign to the serval’s evolved traits associated with its morphology, physiology, metabolism and genetic makeup.

Natural Prey

Information does exist on what servals consume in the wild (Table 1). However the interpretation of such information requires a degree of education and experience that goes beyond the printed page. Unfortunately the producers of commercial diets and exotic animal supplements have disregarded natural diet selection when considering serval diets. For the most part, a serval is just another cat to most commercial diet producers.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prey</th>
<th>% Occurrence</th>
<th>Prey</th>
<th>% Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rodents, shrews</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Grasshoppers, beetles</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frogs</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Snakes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Geertsema (1985)

What is interesting with the data in Table 1 is that one can conclude that the scat of the serval indicates a high percentage of other animals other than rodents.

The companion study done by Geertsema (1985) involves almost 1000 direct observations of what servals were feeding on. He found that 89 percent of the kills were mammals, 6 percent snakes, 2 percent frogs, 1.4 percent insects and 1.3 percent birds.

Geertsema was unable to follow the servals into the wetter area so he had to analyze the 56 scats listed.

The most common rodent prey was the vlei rat (43%), followed by the pygmy mouse (18%). Birds included quails, flamingoes, quelea and teal.

Difficulties of studying wild animals

The problem with studies involving watching what a wild cat eats is the time of the year you observe it and also the year effect. The populations of available prey will obviously vary according to environmental conditions and the availability of the preys optimal breeding and feeding conditions.
Difficulties of studying wild animals cont.

In the Geertsema study the vlei rats and pygmy mice were the main prey throughout the year. Half as many vlei rats were eaten during the wet season compared with the dry season. The number of Nile rats doubled and pocket mice tripled that were eaten increased during the wet season to make up for this shortfall.

Vlei rats are the preferred prey of the serval because of their larger body size compared to other rodents available. It is common for wild cats to prey on the largest prey they can physically handle. The maximum prey size that a cat species can kill is related to its body size (Kitchener 1991). It is when the population of the optimum prey size declines that cats switch their diet to reflect the prey that is abundant.

In a sample of 65 serval stomachs from Zimbabwe, the most common prey animals, vlei rats and mutimammate rats, accounted for more than 80% of the prey (Smithers, 1971).

The problem with many of the observational studies is that the prey’s digestive tract was not analyzed to see the potential other nutrients that were consumed along with the prey. Lucky for caretakers of servals that use the professional products from Oasis, these crucial dietary factors have been considered.

Many rodents are consumed whole including all the digestive contents. The rodents have unique diets that influence the overall nutrient intake of the serval.

Commercial Diets

Commercial domestic cat diets fed to servals fail in many ways in their delivery of the proper nutrients, densities and ratios of ingredients. Equally as dangerous are those commercial diets that use fillers and meat by-products that cause harmful metabolic stressors in servals.

Unfortunately most practicing veterinarians have never been trained in the identification of exotic cat nutritional related diseases, so the commercial food manufactures are never implicated in the diseases and problems that veterinarians are treating on a daily basis.
What should we do?

One size fits all diets for servals and other exotic cats are not advisable. The best method to feed servals is to balance a raw meat diet with the proper nutrients derived from a professionally formulated supplement such as Oasis Felidae and Oasis Primal Cal. The experts at Oasis have studied servals for over twenty years and they know what it takes to optimize their genetic potential.

There are copies but there is only one Oasis brand.