

Adversity forges unlikely friendship between hyenas, wolves

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It is often true in life that adversity makes humans more likely to lean on one another.

That theme of interdependence in hard times apparently holds true in the animal kingdom, according to a new study co-authored by a researcher from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Vladimir Dinets, UT assistant professor of psychology, examined the unlikely friendship between striped [hyenas](#) (*Hyaena hyaena*) and grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) in the southern Negev, Israel. He suspects that the particularly inhospitable conditions of the extreme desert—and a need for food—might have pushed the two enemies into an unusual alliance.

The study was recently published in the journal *Zoology in the Middle East*. Dinets co-authored the study with Benjamin Eligulashvili, an Israel-based zoologist.

Dinets noted that humans can learn from the hyena-wolf partnership.

"Animal behavior is often more flexible than described in textbooks," he said. "When necessary, animals can abandon their usual strategies and learn something completely new and unexpected. It's a very useful skill for people, too."

Hyenas and wolves are generally not friendly toward other carnivores. Hyenas fight epic battles with lions and African wild dogs, and take over kills that leopards and cheetahs have made. They easily kill domestic dogs, no matter the size, in one-on-one fights. Wolves hunt and kill lynxes, coyotes and even dogs, their closest relatives.

So Dinets and Eligulashvili were surprised when they observed striped hyenas—the little known, mostly solitary relatives of the better-known spotted hyenas of Africa—in the middle of grey wolf packs, moving together through a maze of canyons in the southern part of the Negev desert.

The researchers initially inferred this behavior from animal tracks. The second time, four years later, they observed it directly in the same approximate location. It is unknown if the same animals were involved in both cases. It is also unknown if this was a unique aberrant behavior or something happening regularly but never before recorded.

Dinets theorizes that both predators tolerated each other because they benefit from roaming the desert together. Wolves are more agile and can chase and take down all large animals of the region, while hyenas have an acute sense of smell and can locate carrion from many miles away. Hyenas also are better at digging out buried garbage and cracking open large bones and tin cans.

Both the [grey wolf](#) and the striped hyena are found in many geographic areas and overlap in many parts of Asia. But the southern Negev is the most arid place where both species are known to occur.

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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