



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Forensic Taphonomy and Ecology of North American Scavengers*

**BY** Susan N Sincerbox and Elizabeth A DiGangi. Academic Press, 2017. Paperback ISBN: 9780128132432; eBook ISBN: 9780128132630. DOI: [10.1016/C2016-0-04706-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/C2016-0-04706-X). 232 pages. US\$49.95.

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Have you ever pondered the dining habits of a mountain lion, or questioned the culinary palate of a California condor? Then *Forensic Taphonomy and Ecology of North American Scavengers* by Susan Sincerbox and Elizabeth DiGangi is the text for you.

This book explores the signs left behind on bodies by scavengers on the North American continent. Sincerbox and DiGangi provide a comprehensive review of the way vertebrates affect bodies postmortem. They touch on evolution and the methods various animals have developed to detect, access, and glean nourishment from the deceased. The authors then describe cues a medicolegal death investigator or crime scene specialist may take to effectively explore the site of scavenged remains for missing personal effects or body parts. Their exploration of species and their scavenging behavior goes well beyond the common vulture or coyote to cover suids, alligators, and even sharks. The authors' description of the scavenging species themselves includes the animals' dentition, morphology, and habitat. Then covers their behavior and marks imparted on the bodies they dine upon.

Both Sincerbox and DiGangi have training and research experience in anthropology. The human focus of this text, however, should not deter the veterinarian or animal biologist from perusing its 232 pages. The data it contains is relevant and applicable to any organism with bones and soft tissues.

The text is easy to read and, characteristic of the quirky personalities of many in the field of forensic medicine, at

times, lighthearted. With chapter titles such as "There is no such thing as a free lunch: the evolution of scavenging" and "Unwitting accomplices: scavengers and forensic investigation," this book could (and did!) make for pleasant, informative vacation reading. The in-depth descriptions of modifications that individual species may impart onto soft tissues or bones are inclusive and well-relayed. The extensive section on each taxonomic group or species concludes with a bulleted summary and a table distilling the information relayed in the narrative, a format that should appeal to a variety of learning styles.

The book could be improved in its images, which are primarily confined to the fifth chapter, "What big teeth you have: taphonomic signatures of North American scavengers." Most images in this chapter are of the animal scavengers that are deftly described on the pages. There are relatively few images of the lacerations, punctures, and furrows these scavengers induce on the soft tissue and bone. All images are in black-and-white and sometimes not bright or contrasted enough to help the reader clearly see the changes depicted.

All-in-all, *Forensic Taphonomy and Ecology of North American Scavengers* fills an informational niche that has not been fully explored in one concise volume. The data relayed is useful for investigators and medical professionals in both the veterinary and human worlds. Tuck it in next to your bear spray for your next cabin-in-the-woods retreat.