

The Effects of Avian Scavenging on the Decomposition of *Sus scrofa*

Studies throughout the U.S. have explored the effects of scavengers on bone and flesh to differentiate the marks left by scavengers from those of other previously inflicted trauma. However, there is a tremendous gap in data on the effects of the avian community effects in the northern East Coast area. Avian scavengers, such as turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*), which specialize in carrion, and hawks, severely alter postmortem interval of a body left in the open. The purpose of this research was to study the events of postmortem changes due to avian species and the decomposition process in Oswego, New York through utilizing pig (*Sus scrofa*) cadavers as human proxies. The changes in decomposition of eight individual pigs were documented over a period of two months. Two separate environments, wooded and open, were studied to note differences in both decomposition rate and the type of avian species attracted. Insect activity varied across all four enclosures leading to a unique micro-environment at each pig despite the same habitat and exposure to weather conditions. The experimental pigs were predated on by a single avian species, turkey vultures, but they did not heavily affect the rate of decomposition. Insects affected the rate of decomposition the most and scavenger activity was minimal and limited to a few days out of the month. Future studies will look into different rates of decomposition and presence of scavengers throughout different seasons.

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