
TAPHONOMIC EVIDENCE FOR THE SOUTHERNMOST PLEISTOCENE HYENA DENNING AND CANNIBALISM IN ASIA: YAI RUAK CAVE, PENINSULAR THAILAND

H. E. Anderson^{1*}, T. Thiangtham², K. Suraprasit²

¹ University of Warsaw, Faculty of Biology, Żwirki i Wigury 101, 02-096, Warsaw

² Department of Geology, Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

*presenting author, h.anderson@uw.edu.pl

Keywords: *Pleistocene, cave, Spotted hyena, cannibalism, Peninsular Thailand*

This paper presents a detailed taphonomic analysis of a late Middle Pleistocene carnivore-accumulated bone assemblage from Yai Ruak Cave, Krabi Province, southern Thailand, representing the southernmost evidence of Pleistocene hyena denning activity currently known in Asia. **The assemblage includes an associated rhinoceros mandible and vertebral cache**, together with the first documented evidence of cannibalism by *Crocota crocuta ultima* in the region. Surface modifications, including bite marks, polishing, digestion etching, furrowing, and extensive fragmentation, indicate intensive carnivore processing of skeletal remains. Stratigraphic concentration, spatial clustering, and layered accumulation patterns suggest repeated or prolonged occupation of the cave by hyenas over time.

Patterns of selective bone destruction, variation in bite mark size, and evidence of caching behaviour strongly support the interpretation of the site as a long-term family den occupied by both adult and juvenile individuals. These findings provide rare insight into the behaviour, palaeoecology, and behavioural flexibility of late Pleistocene hyenas, including their exploitation of large megafauna within tropical Southeast Asia. More broadly, the study expands the known biogeographic range of spotted hyenas in Asia and highlights the importance of tropical cave deposits for reconstructing predator-prey dynamics, trophic webs, and previously unrecognised carnivore behaviours in underexplored regions of Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgements: We thank geologists from Mineral Resources Office Region 4, Department of Mineral Resources, Surat Thani: Mana Rugbumrung; technicians Niwat Wattanayomnaporn, Manatthawut Chusaeng; Krabi Caving Club; Satapat Kumpitak; Chulalongkorn University; Pattamon Yontraksakul; Katakrit Chaisuwan; Plai Phraya SAO; funded by Fossil Management Fund 2022 (DMR), K.S., Winifred Violet Scott Fund, H.E.A awarded.

23rd conference of the EAVP

– European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontologists

Vilnius, 29th June – 5th July 2026

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23rd conference of the European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontologists

Vilnius, Lithuania

June 29th - July 5th

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Welcome!	1
Information for attendees	2
A word about Philippe Taquet	3
Programme	4
Abstracts	16
Oral presentations	16
Session 1: VERTEBRATES, METHODS & TAPHONOMY	17
Session 2: SPECIAL SESSION — TRIBUTE TO PHILIPPE TAQUET	27
Session 3: MESOZOIC VERTEBRATE EVOLUTION AND FUNCTIONAL MORPHOLOGY	56
Session 4: CENOZOIC VERTEBRATE EVOLUTION & PALAEOECOLOGY	61
Session 5: FOSSILLEGAL 2026	86
Session 6: COLLECTION, METHODS AND INNOVATION IN VERTEBRATE PALAEOLOGY	89
Flash talks	101
Posters	106
List of participants	157
Code of conduct	164