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Feeding behavior of local goats grazing in a north African forest pasture

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In north Africa, forest pastures are an essential component of extensive goat production. In Morocco, the pasture-based system provides 80% of the diet requirements of grazing animals in the mountainous pasturelands such as the High Atlas and the Rif. In northern Morocco, forest pastures constitute the complete feed resource of local goat breeds. One of the main problems of the extensive livestock systems in Morocco is the lack of information on the feeding behavior of local goats under grazing conditions. This work was undertaken in the mountainous forest pasture of Beni Arouss (Northern Morocco) to study the seasonal variations of the foraging behavior of local grazing goats. Eight local goats of the Beni Arouss breed were selected to explore their browsing behavior during three grazing seasons (spring: lactation period, summer, and fall: late pregnancy period). During each grazing season, the direct observation method was used to compare diet composition, intake rate, and diet selectivity of goats. The bite mass of each plant species selected by goats was estimated using hand-plucked simulation. The results showed a wide seasonal variation in diet composition, intake rate, and diet selectivity. Goats recorded the highest biting rate during summer and fall seasons (about 22 bites/min). The highest intake rate was recorded during spring (5.6 g DM/min) which was statistically different from that obtained in summer and fall. Woody species were more selected independently of the season ($P < 0.001$). The goats' diet was composed mainly of *Cistus spp.*, Herbaceous (grass and forbs), *Lavandula stoechas*, *Quercus spp.*, and *Myrtus communis*. Knowledge about the feeding behavior of goats could be used as the first guide for pasture managers to ensure herd and forest sustainability.