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The BEAST Database of Wildlife Representations from Egypt and Nubia (c. 22,000–30BC)

DATA PAPER

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ABSTRACT

We present a database comprising records of wildlife species >2 kg identified in depictions or man-made objects from Egypt and Nubia from the Last Glacial Maximum to the end of the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt (c.22,000BC–30BC) as reported in the literature. The categories of representations include: tomb reliefs and paintings, temple reliefs, rock art (engravings and paintings), ostraca, stelae, palettes, depictions on ceramics or various other objects, statues, figurines, amulets, various other objects or object parts shaped as wildlife species. The database is deposited in the Open Quaternary Dataverse (Harvard Dataverse) and provides a resource for researchers across disciplines investigating topics related to regional zoogeography and interactions between climate, human populations and biodiversity during the Holocene. The database was compiled as part of the Leverhulme-funded *Biodiversity in Egyptian Archaeology during Societal Transitions (BEAST)* project and has been used in the research reported in Lazagabaster et al. 2024, Bro-Jorgensen et al. 2025, and Spedding et al. 2025.

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KEYWORDS:
Egypt; Nubia; depictions; art; wild species; temples; tombs; rock art

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(1) OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY LOCATION

Harvard Dataverse (Open Quaternary Dataverse) https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYQ2F4 (Spedding et al. 2025).

INTRODUCTION

We present a database comprising records of vertebrates >2 kg (see 'Methods', below) identified in depictions or man-made objects from Egypt and Nubia from the Last Glacial Maximum to the end of the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt (c. 22,000BC–30BC). The area covered is modern Egypt (including Sinai) and modern Sudan north of Khartoum (Nubia). The database is provided as a resource for researchers working on wildlife in ancient Egypt and Nubia.

The database was compiled between 01/04/2022 and 03/12/2024 as part of the Leverhulme-funded *Biodiversity in Egyptian Archaeology during Societal Transitions (BEAST)* project and its purpose was to provide a resource for researchers across disciplines investigating topics related to regional zoogeography and interactions between climate, human populations and biodiversity during the Holocene. There is no central source for this information, which is scattered across a variety of publications in diverse disciplines including Egyptology, archaeozoology, and rock art studies, and this database should make it easier for researchers in different fields to easily access the extant evidence.

The categories of representations include: tomb reliefs and paintings, temple reliefs, rock art (engravings and paintings), ostraca, stelae, palettes, statues, figurines, amulets, and depictions on ceramics or other objects. The database is deposited in the Open Quaternary Dataverse (Harvard Dataverse) and has been used in the research reported in Lazagabaster et al. 2024, Bro-Jorgensen et al. 2025, and Spedding et al. 2025. Due to the parameters of the grant, the database will not be updated by its initial compilers, but we encourage people to download it and add to it for their own research as there is currently no provision for the original file to be updated beyond the end date of 03/12/2024.

CONTEXT

Spatial coverage

Description: sites in modern Egypt (including Sinai), the Egyptian and Lower Nubian Eastern and Western Deserts and their oases, and modern Sudan, north of Khartoum (Nubia).
Northern boundary: 31.52842222, 31.89215556,
Southern boundary: 15.6, 32.5,
Eastern boundary: 21.916667, 25.016667,
Western boundary: 23.908611, 35.4725

Temporal coverage

The temporal range covers the period from the Last Glacial Maximum to the end of the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt i.e. 22,000BC to 30BC.

For further details of sites and break down of the specific time periods see associated metadata document (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYQ2F4).

(2) METHODS

STEPS

Published sources were searched intensively for records of depictions of wildlife species >2 kg from Egypt and Nubia focusing on the period c. 22,000BC–30BC; the 2 kg threshold was chosen primarily due to the focus of the BEAST project on the community ecology of larger terrestrial animal species and secondarily due to the greater difficulty of assigning representations of smaller animals to species. For each entry, the following data was recorded: Entry number, Scientific_Name; Common_Name; ID_Certainty; Possible_Alternative_ID/Description; Depiction type/Object; Number of animals_shown; Region; Site; Context (such as tomb, temple, rockface); Latitude; Longitude; Time_Period; Sub_Time_Period; Terminus Post Quem_(BC/AD); Terminus Ante Quem_(BC/AD); Terminus Post Quem_(BP); Terminus Post Quem_(BP); Notes; Porter_and_Moss_Number (for the Egyptian material); Bibliography.

SAMPLING STRATEGY

An effort was made to include all published sources, which included peer-reviewed journals, site reports (i.e., monographs, chapters in edited volumes, journal articles, newsletters), edited volumes and conference proceedings. Unpublished sources included PhD theses, reports, and personal communications.

QUALITY CONTROL

The data is entered into the database as recorded in the source; references are given for the reader to assess the reliability themselves. Where the identification in the source is uncertain, it is noted in the column 'ID_Certainty'.

CONSTRAINTS

The user should treat the data cautiously as the identifications in the literature are not always reliable. Dating of rock art is associated with considerable uncertainty.

For further details see associated metadata document (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYQ2F4).

(3) DATASET DESCRIPTION

OBJECT NAME

The BEAST database of wildlife representations from Egypt and Nubia (The BEAST database of wildlife representations from Egypt and Nubia (c. 22,000–30BC).xlsx (Excel) version 1) dated to c. 22,000–30BC, is based on published

information, and thus is secondary data. The material is presented in an excel file that is searchable by the different headings (see 'Methods', above, for these). Amongst other questions that the database can address, researchers can identify the different species recorded at different periods, their locations, and whether actual faunal remains of the different species pictured have been found or not.

DATA TYPE
Secondary data

FORMAT NAMES AND VERSIONS
The BEAST database of wildlife representations from Egypt and Nubia (c. 22,000–30BC).xlsx (Excel) version 1.

CREATION DATES
01/04/2022 to 03/12/2024

DATASET CREATORS

LANGUAGE
English

LICENSE
CC0 1.0

PUBLICATION DATE
19/05/2025

(4) REUSE POTENTIAL

This database can be used for aggregation, reference, and analysis of animals found in Egypt, both native and imported. This provides evidence to address questions concerning the environment, the economy and trade. The database is comprehensive but not complete and depending on the scope of the study, the user can use the database as a starting point to be supplemented with additional entries, especially publications appearing after 2024, which was the cut-off date for the project. Using Excel permits the sorting of the database by different columns, or combination of columns, and thus the data can be displayed in different ways that make it easy to use, and to obtain a quick overview of patterns in wildlife depictions of the region by location, time and/or species. It is easily downloadable and can be added to by individual users. Images were not included due to issues of copyright. The user is advised to refer to the original publications for the images and quality control in cases of doubt.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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REFERENCES

All references used for details of animal depictions are included under the bibliography column in the database https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYQ2F4

Spedding, JV, Ikram, S, Snape, S, Lazagabaster, IA and **Bro-Jørgensen, J.** 2025. "The BEAST database of wildlife representations from Egypt and Nubia (c.22,000–30BC)". https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FYQ2F4, Open Quaternary Dataverse (Harvard Dataverse).

OTHER REFERENCES
References from the BEAST project utilizing the database:

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