Were the prehistoric Maya vegetarians?  
Excavation of faunal remains, or the lack thereof, at the site of Guijarral, Belize.

By: Erol Kavountzis, Graduate Student, Dept. of Anthropology

Methods and Materials:
Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)  
Lead by Dr. Jon Hageman  
11 undergraduate students  
3 graduate students.

Field Sampling Technique:
A grid of shovel test pits (STP) around the Guijarral Site Center (Figure 2).
- Shovel test pits is a sampling technique used by archaeologists to locate areas of artifact concentrations.
- These samples were about 15 m from the base of the structures in 5 m intervals in all four cardinal directions.
- Soil samples (4 liters) for both zooarchaeological, and ethnobotanical analysis were taken from each STP (Figure 3).

Laboratory research:
187 soil samples were collected
Each sample was wet screened through nested 1/4-, 1/8-, and 1/16-inch screens using methods developed by Dr. Kitty Emery and Erin Thornton (Figure 4).
This nested system of screens is used to collect both large and small animal remains.
Screened samples were dried and scanned for faunal remains by myself and the students.

Results:
None of the samples contained faunal remains.
But, botanical remains were collected from many of the shovel test pits.
And, some soil samples contained ceramics fragments.
We were able to locate areas of ceramic concentrations that suggest these were original middens or areas of Deposition (Figure 5).

Conclusions:
There was no faunal material found in any of the 187 shovel test pits.
We assume collection methods are not the reason for the lack of faunal materials because soil samples were water-screened through multiple screen sizes.
We assume, preservation conditions are not the reason because botanical remains are being preserved.
It is a normal occurrence in Late Classic contexts in NW Belize (Hageman, et al 2007).
With no faunal remains, it is still unknown about what types and amounts of animals were consumed at Guijarral.

Reasons for no faunal Remains:
Based on ceramics, it is possible that animal remains were not discarded in traditional middens.
Animals remains could have been used for tools or crushed for medicines.
Recent ethnoarchaeological research found that present-day Maya cache bones ritual offerings, perhaps animal remains were ritually disposed or kept at home (Brown 2005).
There could be other locations for ancient garbage dumps.
Do you have any other ideas?

Future Studies:
Utilizing wet-screening through nested 1/4-, 1/8-, and 1/16-inch screens at other sites throughout the Maya region.
At Guijarral, in particular, it would be interesting to look for possible middens further from the site center.

Bibliography:
Emery, Kitty 2004 Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California.
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