

Neandertals sophisticated and fearless hunters

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Neandertals, the 'stupid' cousins of modern humans were capable of capturing the most impressive animals. This indicates that Neandertals were anything but dim. Dutch researcher Gerrit Dusseldorp analysed their daily forays for food to gain insights into the complex behaviour of the Neandertal. His analysis revealed that the hunting was very knowledge intensive.

Although it is now clear that Neandertals were hunters and not scavengers, their exact hunting methods are still something of a mystery. Dusseldorp investigated just how sophisticated the Neandertals' hunting methods really were. His analysis of two archaeological sites revealed that Neandertals in warm forested areas preferred to hunt solitary game but that in colder, less forested areas they preferred to hunt the more difficult to capture herding animals.

The Neandertals were not easily intimidated by their game. Rhinoceroses, bisons and even [predators](#) such as the brown bear were all on their menu. Dusseldorp established that just as for modern humans, the environment and the availability of food determined the choice of prey and the hunting method adopted. If the circumstances allowed it, Neandertals lived in large groups and even the most attractive and difficult to catch prey were within their reach.

Coordination and communication

Although herding animals are difficult to surprise and isolate, many such game lived on the open steppes. This large supply attracted large groups of Neandertals. That the Neandertals were capable of hunting down such elusive game demonstrates that they had good coordination skills and could communicate well with each other.

Each prey has a specific cost-benefit scenario. For example, game that are more difficult to catch yield more calories and have a more usable, thick fleece. Dusseldorp used these data to examine the Neandertal's preferences. He also analysed the prey of hyenas in the same manner. Hyenas were important competitors of Neandertals as they had a similar dietary pattern.

Dusseldorp demonstrated that Neandertals, thanks to their intelligence, even surpassed hyenas at capturing the strongest game. All things being considered, the Neandertals were skilled and highly intelligent hunters. So the idea that Neandertals were brute musclemen can be dismissed.

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