Study finds crocodiles are sophisticated hunters
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Recent studies have found that crocodiles and their relatives are highly intelligent animals capable of sophisticated behavior such as advanced parental care, complex communication and use of tools for hunting.

New University of Tennessee, Knoxville, research published in the journal Ethology Ecology and Evolution shows just how sophisticated their hunting techniques can be.

Vladimir Dinets, a research assistant professor in UT's Department of Psychology, has found that crocodiles work as a team to hunt their prey. His research tapped into the power of social media to document such behavior.

"Despite having been made independently by different people on different continents, these records showed striking similarities. This suggests that the observed phenomena are real, rather than just tall tales or misinterpretation," said Dinets.

Crocodiles and alligators were observed conducting highly organized game drives. For example, crocodiles would swim in a circle around a shoal of fish, gradually making the circle tighter until the fish were forced into a tight "bait ball." Then the crocodiles would take turns cutting across the center of the circle, snatching the fish.

Sometimes animals of different size would take up different roles. Larger alligators would drive a fish from the deeper part of a lake into the shallows, where smaller, more agile alligators would block its escape. In one case, a huge saltwater crocodile scared a pig into running off a trail and into a lagoon where two smaller crocodiles were waiting in ambush—the circumstances suggested that the three crocodiles had anticipated each other's positions and actions without being able to see each other.
"All these observations indicate that crocodilians might belong to a very select club of hunters—just 20 or so species of animals, including humans—capable of coordinating their actions in sophisticated ways and assuming different roles according to each individual's abilities. In fact, they might be second only to humans in their hunting prowess," said Dinets.

Dinets said more observations are needed to better understand what exactly the animals are capable of. "And these observations don't come easily," he said.

**More information:** Ethology Ecology & Evolution
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