

Catfish Learning to Hunt Pigeons on Land

First get the theme song from *Jaws* in your head, and then proceed.

In an unusual development that researchers are calling evidence of adaptive behavior, some catfish have taken to jumping on land to hunt live pigeons.

Discover Magazine's Ed Yong writes, "These particular catfish have taken to lunging out of the water, grabbing a pigeon, and then wriggling back into the water to swallow their prey. In the process, they temporarily strand themselves on land for a few seconds."

Researchers captured video of the European catfish, which reside in the River Tarn in southwestern France. In the footage, several of the fish, which range in length from 3 to nearly 5 feet, are seen thrusting their bodies from the shallow banks onto land where they capture pigeons and drag them back into the water.

Some dolphins and killer whales have exhibited similar behavior, though both are mammals and better equipped to survive on land for brief periods of time.

Still, Julien Cucherousset from Paul Sabatier University in Toulouse has taken to describing the catfish as "freshwater killer whales."

The study results were published in the scientific journal *Plos One*. The study's abstract notes:

"Among a total of 45 beaching behaviors observed and filmed, 28% were successful in bird capture. ... Since this extreme behavior has not been reported in the native range of the species, our results suggest that some individuals in introduced predator populations may adapt their behavior to forage on novel prey in new environments, leading to behavioral and trophic specialization to actively cross the water-land interface."

The above article prompted a memory of my husband & I driving around the tank over in West Home one warm summer day. Like crocks on the banks of the Nile, a few bull frog eyes could be seen. Bull frogs are somewhat of a rarity any more in the Hill Country. I asked Keith what a bull frog eats. He said anything they can catch. At just that moment an unsuspecting killdeer near the edge of the water was nabbed by a frog. As he retreated to deeper water with his prize several more frogs headed his way post haste, presumably to share in this feast. Not being one to let nature takes its course if it means someone gets eaten in my presence, I bailed out of the back of the pickup and waded out until I was able to rescue the victim. When released back on the bank, the killdeer was a little addled. His feathers were a mess. He shook some of the water off and went back to strolling along the edge of the water. He may have ended up in some frog's belly after we left, but at least I had given the killdeer a chance to elicit some adaptive behavior of his own.

Go outside & play!