

Pigs may not fly, but crocs really do climb trees

When most people think about crocodiles, they imagine them crawling along the ground or floating in water, not climbing trees. But a recent study has shown they can do just that.



Credit: vanWelsem/Mabuaya Foundation

Charles Darwin University researcher, Dr Adam Britton, collaborated with University of Tennessee Research Assistant Professor Vladimir Dinets and University of Florida Doctoral Fellow Matthew Shirley on the study, which looks at the tree-climbing and basking behaviour of these reptiles.

The research team observed crocodilian species on three continents – Australia, Africa, and North America – and examined findings from previous studies as well as anecdotal observations.

They found that four species climbed trees, usually above water, but how far they ventured upward and outward varied by their size.

Dr Britton said smaller crocodiles were able to climb higher and further than larger ones, with some species observed climbing as high as four metres.

‘Crocodiles are very agile on land, which is reflected in their climbing ability,’ Dr Britton said.

‘Some of the more goanna-like ancestors of modern crocodiles were thought to be tree-dwellers, and this tree-climbing behaviour could be a glimpse into the past.’

Dr Britton said climbing behaviour was noticed frequently in situations where there was dense vegetation or competition for space on river banks, suggesting the individuals needed alternatives for regulating their body temperature.

‘Habitat surveillance of potential threats and could be another driver for smaller crocodiles to climb trees,’ Dr Britton said.

The data suggests that at least some crocodile species are able to climb trees, despite lacking any obvious morphological adaptations to do so.

The [research](#) is published in the journal *Herpetology Notes*.

Source: Charles Darwin University

From ECOS online <http://www.ecomagazine.com/?paper=EC14048>