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Vigilance and group size in ostriches

Brian C.R. Bertram

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Abstract

Wild ostriches were observed while feeding alone or in groups of up to four birds, and their vigilance (proportion of time with the head up) recorded. Individual vigilance declined as group size increased, mainly through a decrease in the frequency with which the head was raised. Males were more vigilant than females, mainly because they kept their heads up for longer. Vigilance was influenced more by the presence than by the vigilance of a companion. When a head would stay down for a long time was impossible for a predator to predict. It is concluded that grouping by ostriches when feeding results in only a slight reduction in the group's vulnerability to successful predator attack, but in a considerable decrease in individual vulnerability.

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