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Fish-Hunting by Wild Japanese Macaques in Riverine Environments: Behavioral 2 and Demographic Patterns with Implications for Sex-Invariant Foraging in Early 3 Hominins 4 5 Authors 6 Ayaka Tsuchihashi<sup>1#</sup>, Takuya Matusmoto<sup>1, 2#\*</sup>, Ema Nagahara<sup>1</sup>, Kosuke Hayashi<sup>3</sup>, 7 Genki Yamada<sup>4</sup>, Takayuki Ogura<sup>5</sup>, Mone Ito<sup>5</sup>, Shohei Isokado<sup>6</sup>, Koji Tojo<sup>1, 2</sup>, 8 Masaki Takenaka<sup>1, 2, 7</sup> 9 <sup>1</sup> Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, Shinshu University, Asahi 3-1-1, 10 Matsumoto 390-8621, Japan. 11 <sup>2</sup> Institute of Mountain Science, Shinshu University, Asahi 3-1-1, Matsumoto, 12 Nagano 390-8621, Japan. 13 <sup>3</sup> NHK Enterprises, Inc., Kamiyama 4-14, Shibuya, Tokyo 150-0047, Japan. 14 <sup>4</sup> G-Vision, Inc., Nishitsutsujigaoka 1-54-12, Chofu, Tokyo 182-0006, Japan. 15 <sup>5</sup> Kozo Production, Udagawa-cho 37-10-301, Shibuya, Tokyo 150-0042, Japan. 16 <sup>6</sup> ACCEL24 ltd., Shiroishi-ku 9-1-10-12, Sapporo, Hokkaido 003-0829, Japan. 17 <sup>7</sup> Faculty of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Tsukuba, 1-1-1 18

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- 32

#### 33 ■Abstract

34 Fish-hunting, rare among nonhuman primates, has been hypothesized to markedly influence hominin evolution. We report 71 cases of fish-hunting by 35 wild Japanese macaques (Macaca fuscata) inhabiting a subalpine riverine 36 environment. Behavioral sequences were categorized into the exploration, 37 attempt, and processing phases. All events were solitary and tool-free. No 38 behavioral evidence indicated the facilitation of successful fish catching by 39 conspecific presence. Most preyed fish were salmonids, and nearly all were fully 40 consumed. Significant sex differences in fish-hunting frequency were not 41 42 observed, and certain juveniles also engaged in fish catching. The absence of visible bone remains in fecal samples with confirmed fish DNA suggests that 43 44 tool-free fish consumption leaves limited archaeological traces. These findings provide novel comparative data on primate aquatic foraging and suggest the 45 feasibility of solitary, non-tool-assisted fish-hunting under certain ecological 46 conditions, offering new perspectives on early hominin subsistence strategies. 47

#### 48 **Introduction**

The earliest evidence of aquatic fauna consumption by early hominins dates 49 to approximately 3.0–2.6 million years ago<sup>1</sup>. The proposed role of aquatic fauna 50 51 as animal-based food sources in hominin diets reflects post-bipedalism dietary shifts<sup>2</sup>. The oldest archaeological evidence of fish consumption dates to 52 approximately 1.95 million years ago during the early Pleistocene<sup>3</sup>. Among 53 aquatic fauna, fish are particularly rich in long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, 54 including eicosapentaenoic and docosahexaenoic acids, compared to terrestrial 55 fauna. The proposed contribution of fish consumption to early brain volume 56 expansion in the genus Homo has been linked to its nutritional profile<sup>4</sup> (but 57 see<sup>5</sup>). Despite the hypothesized significance of fish consumption in hominin 58 59 evolution, evidence remains scarce regarding the origins, diffusion, capture strategies, and demographic patterns of fish-hunting individuals. 60 To better understand the evolutionary trajectory of human behavior, biological 61 anthropology has long utilized behavioral comparisons with extant nonhuman 62 primates<sup>6,7</sup>. However, many primate species range from arboreal to 63 64 predominantly terrestrial lifestyles, and only a small proportion—approximately 10% (~30 species)—regularly interact with aquatic environments<sup>8</sup>. Reports of 65

| 66 | fish consumption among extant nonhuman primates remain scarce. Based on a                   |
|----|---|
| 67 | list of studies addressing the consumption of aquatic fauna by nonhuman                     |
| 68 | primates <sup>8_11</sup> , we compiled a comprehensive literature survey on fish-catching   |
| 69 | and consumption in non-human primates (Table 1; $^{12}-^{28}$ ). Including suggestive       |
| 70 | evidence such as opportunistic observations by field assistants in wild and                 |
| 71 | captive settings, fish-catching and/or consumption have been reported in 13                 |
| 72 | primate species to date. Among these, only seven species have been                          |
| 73 | documented to catch and consume live fish under natural conditions.                         |
| 74 | These findings from nonhuman primates offer important insights: fish may                    |
| 75 | function as a fallback food when other resources are scarce <sup>17, 21</sup> ; fish-eating |
| 76 | behavior may be socially transmitted within groups <sup>15</sup> ; and, in some cases, tool |
| 77 | use accompanies fish-hunting <sup>10</sup> . However, consistent patterns across ecological |
| 78 | or behavioral factors remain elusive. While this may reflect phylogenetic                   |
| 79 | differences across species or ecological and genetic variations within species,             |
| 80 | several methodological and contextual limitations challenge broad                           |
| 81 | interpretations. For instance, some studies report only a handful of fish-hunting           |
| 82 | events over extensive observation periods (e.g., three cases over 20,000                    |
| 83 | observation hours in long-tailed macaques <sup>17</sup> ). Others document substantial      |

| 84  | anthropogenic influence, such as individuals exploiting discarded fish or using             |
|-----|---|
| 85  | fishing tools left behind by humans <sup>9</sup> . Furthermore, in orangutans—a species     |
| 86  | with relatively frequent fish-hunting reports—provisioning is common, and                   |
| 87  | individuals often refrain from consuming their captured fish <sup>10</sup> . These issues   |
| 88  | complicate biological anthropological efforts to understand the adaptive                    |
| 89  | significance and evolutionary origins of fish consumption in the human lineage.             |
| 90  | Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on a wild population of                    |
| 91  | Japanese macaques (Macaca fuscata) in Kamikochi, central Japan, where                       |
| 92  | individuals have been observed catching and consuming live fish from both a                 |
| 93  | flowing river and spring-fed pools with a relatively high frequency since 2021.             |
| 94  | This unprovisioned population offers a rare opportunity to investigate fish-                |
| 95  | hunting behavior under natural foraging conditions. In 2021, a molecular dietary            |
| 96  | analysis revealed the presence of salmonid DNA in 7 out of 38 winter fecal                  |
| 97  | samples collected from this group <sup>13</sup> . Subsequent direct behavioral observations |
| 98  | and camera-trap footage confirmed winter fish-hunting by these macaques,                    |
| 99  | with such events occurring at a relatively high frequency <sup>12</sup> .                   |
| 100 | This study investigates the behavioral traits (e.g., presence or absence of tool            |
| 101 | use and cooperation in hunting) and demographic factors (e.g., sex differences              |

and developmental variation) associated with fish-hunting behavior in a wild
 population of Japanese macaques in Kamikochi. Through analysis of behavioral
 patterns and demographic factors among fish-hunting individuals, this study
 clarifies the origins and diffusion of fish consumption in primates.

106 Despite accumulating anecdotal reports, systematic data on sex-specific fishhunting patterns in wild primates remain sparse. In particular, sex differences in 107 hunting behavior are central to anthropology for their potential to inform the 108 evolutionary origins of the sexual division of labor in human societies<sup>29</sup>. Among 109 our closest living relatives, chimpanzees, red colobus monkey hunting and the 110 exploitation of aquatic faunal resources—exemplified by crab fishing—occur 111 more frequently in males and females, respectively<sup>30,9</sup>. These findings 112 113 corroborate patterns observed in extant human foraging societies-male-biased hunting frequency and female targeting of more predictable<sup>31</sup>. These patterns 114 have led to the hypothesis that sex differences in aquatic resource exploitation 115 existed in the hominin lineage<sup>9</sup> and that hunting disparities may have preceded 116 the evolution of the sexual division of labor in modern humans<sup>30</sup>. Despite these 117 118 insights, consistent patterns of sex differences in fish-hunting behavior among nonhuman primates remain unidentified (Table 1). Therefore, detailed 119

| 120 | quantitative analyses of sex-specific fish-hunting patterns are needed to clarify                 |
|-----|---|
| 121 | the origins of hunting-related sex differences, including those related to aquatic                |
| 122 | resource exploitation, and the evolutionary sexual division of labor. The                         |
| 123 | Japanese macaques of Kamikochi, with observable and measurable variations in                      |
| 124 | fish-hunting behavior in the wild, offer a valuable model to address this gap.                    |
| 125 |   |
| 126 | ■Methods  |
| 127 | Study site  |
| 128 | This study was conducted in Kamikochi, located in the city of Matsumoto,                          |
| 129 | Nagano Prefecture, Japan. Kamikochi lies within the Chubu Sangaku National                        |
| 130 | Park and is situated in a subalpine zone at ~1,500 m above sea level. The Azusa                   |
| 131 | River, which runs through Kamikochi, is characterized by an extremely gentle                      |
| 132 | gradient of ~8‰, rising only 80 m over a 10 km stretch from 1,490 m to 1,570                      |
| 133 | m. This topography partly results from historical volcanic activity in the region <sup>32</sup> . |
| 134 | In addition, numerous springs throughout the area ensure the year-round                           |
| 135 | presence of small streams and pools, even during the winter season. Kamikochi                     |
| 136 | is also a popular tourist destination, attracting over 1 million visitors annually. As            |
| 137 | a result, local Japanese macaques (Macaca fuscata) are human-habituated                           |

| 138 | without intentional provisioning, enabling direct behavioral observation and    |
|-----|---|
| 139 | continuous tracking. The area thus provides a unique opportunity to conduct     |
| 140 | detailed field observations of wild primates, even under severe winter          |
| 141 | conditions.   |
| 142 |   |
| 143 | Study period and observation methods  |
| 144 | Direct behavioral observations were conducted for two winter periods: 19–30     |
| 145 | January 2022 and 11 January–22 February 2023. The total number of               |
| 146 | observation days was 50. Each day, observers (the authors) conducted fieldwork  |
| 147 | from approximately 09:00 to 16:00, either in a single group or divided into two |
| 148 | teams. The observational subjects comprised three groups of wild Japanese       |
| 149 | macaques inhabiting the Kamikochi region. These groups were designated as       |
| 150 | KT, KK, and KM, in order from west to east based on their ranging areas. The    |
| 151 | home ranges of the KT and KK groups—and those of KK and KM—were either          |
| 152 | overlapping or adjacent.  |
| 153 | Researchers searched for signs of macaque presence (e.g., footprints and        |
| 154 | feeding traces) while driving a survey vehicle along the main road. Upon        |
| 155 | detecting such signs, the macaques were located by tracking on foot. Once       |

| 156 | located, each group was followed, and when individuals appeared near aquatic       |
|-----|--|
| 157 | environments—such as rivers or pools—the protocol shifted to individual-           |
| 158 | following for detailed behavioral monitoring <sup>33</sup> .                       |
| 159 | To maximize fish-hunting observation opportunities, researchers prioritized        |
| 160 | tracking groups located in riverine areas. When a followed group moved away        |
| 161 | from aquatic locations, the observers occasionally discontinued the follow and     |
| 162 | searched for other groups instead.   |
| 163 | Behavioral events near aquatic habitats were recorded using high-definition        |
| 164 | video equipment, including a 4K 2/3-type 3-chip CMOS shoulder-mount                |
| 165 | camcorder (PXW-Z750, SONY), a 4K expert handy camera (FDR-AX100, SONY),            |
| 166 | and a Phantom Flex4K digital cinema camera (Flex4K, PHANTOM).                      |
| 167 |  |
| 168 | Definition of fish catching and dataset  |
| 169 | From the collected video footage, we extracted instances of visible                |
| 170 | interactions between Japanese macaques and fish, including cases with clearly      |
| 171 | discernible fish bodies or silhouettes. Fish-catching was operationally defined as |
| 172 | the successful transfer of a fish by a macaque from below the water surface to     |
| 173 | physical control, typically by hand or mouth, at or above the surface. Each fish-  |

| 174                             | hunting event was defined as a behavioral sequence comprising at least one  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 175                             | fish-catching act. Multiple fish-catching acts occurring within a 10-second   |
| 176                             | interval were classified as a single event—for example, repeated attempts   |
| 177                             | involving escape and recapture were counted as one fish-hunting event.  |
| 178                             | In total, we recorded 57 fish-hunting events during focal follows. We   |
| 179                             | incorporated footage previously reported by Takenaka <i>et al.</i> <sup>12</sup> , comprising six   |
| 180                             | focal-follow events and eight camera-trap recordings. The final dataset included  |
| 181                             | 71 fish-hunting events used for detailed behavioral analyses.   |
| 182                             |   |
|                                 |   |
| 183                             | Individual identification, group assignment, and fish species identification  |
| 183<br>184                      | Individual identification, group assignment, and fish species identification<br>During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques  |
|                                 |   |
| 184                             | During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques  |
| 184<br>185                      | During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques<br>bearing conspicuous physical features, such as scars, or equipped with VHF  |
| 184<br>185<br>186               | During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques<br>bearing conspicuous physical features, such as scars, or equipped with VHF<br>radio collars attached to at least one adult female per group <sup>34</sup> . Group identity  |
| 184<br>185<br>186<br>187        | During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques<br>bearing conspicuous physical features, such as scars, or equipped with VHF<br>radio collars attached to at least one adult female per group <sup>34</sup> . Group identity<br>was inferred based on confirmation of these individually identified macaques.   |
| 184<br>185<br>186<br>187<br>188 | During group follows, individual identification was conducted for macaques<br>bearing conspicuous physical features, such as scars, or equipped with VHF<br>radio collars attached to at least one adult female per group <sup>34</sup> . Group identity<br>was inferred based on confirmation of these individually identified macaques.<br>For camera-trap footage, when individually recognized macaques appeared, |

above the water surface were identified based on body markings and the

193 remains left uneaten by the macaques.

194

### **Determination of sex and age class**

Age was estimated based on physical features, such as body size, and

197 comparison with individuals of known age. Infants were defined as individuals

198 estimated to be within their first year of life. Adults were defined as individuals

199 judged to be at least five years without hair on the sexual skin; all remaining

200 individuals were classified as juveniles.

201 Macaques with visible testes were classified as male. Individuals whose genital

202 regions could be clearly observed but lacked visible testes were classified as

203 females. In addition, individuals with elongated nipples or those observed

204 nursing young were identified as adult females. Individuals not meeting any of

205 these criteria were categorized as sex unknown.

206

#### 207 Group composition data collection

To assess the sex and age composition of each group during the 2023

209 observation period, observers conducted full group scans when many

| 210 | individuals were resting or grooming together. The observers walked along the      |
|-----|--|
| 211 | edge of the group and counted individuals from one end to the other. When          |
| 212 | individually identified macaques were not encountered during these scans, their    |
| 213 | presence was added to the total group count. Due to the need for rapid counts      |
| 214 | during stationary periods, sex was recorded only for adults; subadult and          |
| 215 | juvenile sex were not determined.  |
| 216 |  |
| 217 | Analysis of sex differences in fish-hunting behavior                               |
| 218 | To assess sex differences in fish-hunting behavior, we compared the sex ratio of   |
| 219 | fish-hunting adults with each group's overall adult sex ratio using Fisher's exact |
| 220 | test. All statistical analyses were performed using R software <sup>35</sup> .     |
| 221 |  |
| 222 | Results  |
| 223 | Overview of observed fish-hunting events   |
| 224 | Among the 71 documented fish-hunting events, 57 were conducted by                  |
| 225 | adults, 8 by juveniles, 6 by subadults, and none by infants. All events were       |
| 226 | solitary and tool-free.  |

Each event was classified into exploration, attempt, and processing phases based on pre- and post-capture behavioral sequences. We compiled an ethogram of behavioral elements observed at least once in each phase (Figure 1).

231

#### 232 **Exploration phase**

In five of the 71 fish-hunting events, another individual—an infant in three 233 events, a subadult in one, and an adult in four-was observed within 3 m of the 234 focal animal at the moment of fish catching. An additional seven events 235 involved another individual appearing within 10 m of the focal animal (all 236 adults), within a visible range of the fish-catching action. However, variation in 237 238 the video field of view may have led to underestimation of fish-hunting events involving nearby individuals. 239 In the 10 events where another individual was visibly present within the 240 observable range, no evidence indicated a positive effect of others on fish-241 catching success. For example, no instances were observed of one individual 242 243 capturing a fish flushed by another or of a fish being driven toward another macague in a seemingly cooperative manner. 244

| 245 | Transitions between aquatic foraging behaviors, such as feeding on aquatic        |
|-----|---|
| 246 | plants or aquatic insects, and the fish-exploration phase occurred seamlessly.    |
| 247 | Several instances of supplanting at aquatic sites were observed during the        |
| 248 | exploration phase—involving, presumably, dominant male and female                 |
| 249 | individuals. Here, supplanting refers to one individual displacing another from a |
| 250 | location or resource, typically without overt aggression but implying a           |
| 251 | dominance relationship.   |
| 252 | Because many exploration-phase behaviors could not be conclusively                |
| 253 | attributed to fish targeting, attempts were not reliably countable; consequently, |
| 254 | fish-hunting success rates could not be calculated.                               |
| 255 |   |
| 256 | Attempt phase   |
| 257 | During the attempt phase, the estimated body lengths of the targeted fish         |
| 258 | were approximately 5–20 cm. Based on distinctive body markings, 15 individuals    |
| 259 | were identified as salmonids. In only one case, an adult female was observed      |
| 260 | catching a Rhynchocypris lagowskii. No fish species other than salmonids and      |
| 261 | Rhynchocypris were recorded.  |
| 262 |   |

#### 263 **Processing phase**

264 During the processing phase, no bone- or head-removal behavior was observed regarding the captured fish. In four instances—three involving adult 265 females and one involving an adult male—the captured fish escaped from the 266 surface back into the water during the manipulation process. In a separate case, 267 an adult female repeatedly bit and spat out a captured Rhynchocypris fish, 268 ultimately discarding it with minimal consumption. Skin-removal behavior was 269 observed in a single instance, and the discarded skin was not consumed. 270 Excluding these cases, the remaining 66 events involved the full consumption of 271 272 the captured fish. Notably, even in fecal samples that later tested positive for fish DNA via metabarcoding, fish bones were not visually identifiable. No direct 273 274 inter-individual food transfer was observed during the processing phase. In one instance, immediately after an adult female captured a fish, another adult 275 female approached her at close range. The fish-capturing individual guickly 276 moved away, and the fish was not taken. This was the only observed case that 277 suggested a potential risk of conspecific interference, although no actual 278 279 scrounging or food transfer occurred.

280

281

| 282 | Sex and age composition  |
|-----|--|
| 283 | Figure 3 presents the sex-age composition of individuals involved in fish-         |
| 284 | hunting events and the overall group composition across the three study            |
| 285 | groups. No significant difference was found between adult males and females in     |
| 286 | the number of fish-hunting events or in their proportions within each group        |
| 287 | (Fisher's exact test, $p > 0.5$ ). Fish-hunting behavior was observed in all three |
| 288 | groups (KT, KK, and KM). While many events involved individuals with               |
| 289 | unconfirmed identities, fish-hunting was documented in at least six adult males    |
| 290 | and seven adult females. The youngest individuals of both sexes observed           |
| 291 | catching fish were estimated to be 3 to 4 years old, although their exact age      |
| 292 | could not be determined.   |
| 293 |  |
|     |  |

294 **Discussion** 

This study provides the first detailed account of the behavioral characteristics and demographic factors associated with fish-hunting in wild nonhuman primates under natural conditions (see Table 1). Our findings highlight several notable features: (i) no tool use or overt cooperation was observed; (ii) captured

| 299 | fish were typically consumed in their entirety; (iii) no clear sex differences were                   |
|-----|---|
| 300 | found in fish-hunting frequency among adults; (iv) predispersal males also                            |
| 301 | engaged in fish hunting. Japanese macaques exhibit a broad dietary repertoire                         |
| 302 | encompassing plant and animal foods <sup>36</sup> , a relatively terrestrial lifestyle among          |
| 303 | primates <sup>37</sup> , and a capacity to inhabit cold, temperate environments <sup>38</sup> . These |
| 304 | characteristics parallel key aspects of human ecological flexibility. In addition, as                 |
| 305 | demonstrated in this study, their relatively frequent engagement in fish-                             |
| 306 | hunting—rare among extant nonhuman primates—positions Japanese  |
| 307 | macaques as a valuable comparative model for understanding the evolutionary                           |
| 308 | roots of aquatic resource exploitation, alongside great apes and baboons <sup>39</sup> .              |
| 309 |   |

310 Behavioral traits of fish-hunting

Across all observed instances of fish-hunting, no tool use was documented. Although other individuals were occasionally present near the focal animal during fish-catching, successful captures also occurred in solitary contexts. Moreover, no behavioral evidence suggested that the presence of conspecifics positively influenced hunting success. Discussions of hominin hunting behavior have emphasized tool use<sup>40</sup> and cooperative strategies rooted in advanced

| 317 | cognitive capacities linked to encephalization <sup>41</sup> . However, our findings suggest |
|-----|--|
| 318 | that neither tool use nor cooperation is necessary for successful fish-hunting in            |
| 319 | riverine environments.   |
| 320 | To the extent identifiable, nearly all fish consumed by Japanese macaques                    |
| 321 | were salmonids. In Kamikochi, three salmonid species have been confirmed:                    |
| 322 | white-spotted charr (Salvelinus leucomaenis), brook trout (Salvelinus fontinalis),           |
| 323 | and brown trout (Salmo trutta) <sup>42</sup> . Although the salmonid family was identifiable |
| 324 | from behavioral footage, species-level identification remained unfeasible <sup>43,44</sup> . |
| 325 | When a Japanese macaque captured a non-salmonid fish, Rhynchocypris                          |
| 326 | lagowskii (a cyprinid species), the individual displayed aversive behaviors and              |
| 327 | ultimately discarded the fish after minimal consumption. The bile from cyprinid              |
| 328 | fish contains cyprinol sulfate, a compound toxic to mammals <sup>45</sup> , suggesting that  |
| 329 | the macaque's rejection results from a response to taste or toxicity. This case              |
| 330 | provides potential evidence for species-specific dietary selectivity in Japanese             |
| 331 | macaques' fish consumption.  |
| 332 |  |

333 Demographic factors of fish-hunting

334 Previous studies on fish-hunting in nonhuman primates have not identified

| 335 | consistent patterns regarding sex or age class (Table 1). Our current analysis of  |
|-----|--|
| 336 | 71 fish-hunting events revealed no significant sex differences in fish-hunting     |
| 337 | frequency among adult Japanese macaques. Although the observed fish-               |
| 338 | hunting frequency in younger individuals (estimated to be 3–4 years old or         |
| 339 | older) was lower than would be expected based on group composition, these          |
| 340 | juveniles did engage in successful fish-catching. No fish catching was observed    |
| 341 | in infants (0–2 years old), although several events involved an infant being       |
| 342 | within 3 m of the focal fish-catching individual. Such close-range exposure may    |
| 343 | offer opportunities for social learning, potentially contributing to the emergence |
| 344 | of successful fish-hunting behavior by ages 3–4.                                   |
| 345 | A key direction for future research is the complete identification of all          |
| 346 | individuals in the Kamikochi macaque population. This would allow researchers      |
| 347 | to investigate whether fish-hunting frequency varies by individual or matriline,   |
| 348 | and whether individual-level differences exist in the behavioral repertoire        |
| 349 | associated with fish-hunting (see Figure 1).                                       |
| 350 |  |
| 351 | When and how fish-hunting behavior emerged and spread                              |

352 Long-term studies of Japanese macaques in Kamikochi have been ongoing

| 353 | since 1986, including home-range tracking using collar-mounted radio                           |
|-----|--|
| 354 | transmitters <sup>34</sup> . However, direct behavioral observations during winter were rarely |
| 355 | conducted. Prior to the 2021 report of fish consumption via fecal                              |
| 356 | metabarcoding <sup>13</sup> , fish-catching and consumption had remained undocumented          |
| 357 | in this population.  |
| 358 | Although the exact emergence location and spread extent of fish-hunting                        |
| 359 | behavior remain unclear, Kamikochi's unique geographical–geological                            |
| 360 | characteristics—such as flat riverbeds formed by dammed lakes from volcanic                    |
| 361 | activity and the presence of spring-fed streams that remain unfrozen in winter—                |
| 362 | may have created ecological conditions facilitating the innovation of fish-                    |
| 363 | hunting behavior <sup>12</sup> . As in the case of the Koshima macaques, where the             |
| 364 | consumption of dead fish spread rapidly within the group (with 75% of                          |
| 365 | individuals engaging in the behavior within seven years of its initial observation             |
| 366 | in 1979 <sup>15</sup> ), fish-hunting in Kamikochi may also have spread socially within        |
| 367 | groups after its innovation. Moreover, the fish-hunting presence across all three              |
| 368 | study groups suggests potential intergroup transmission. Given typical male                    |
| 369 | Japanese macaque dispersal around age five <sup>46</sup> , fish-hunting observation by         |
| 370 | predispersal males is particularly suggestive. While primate behavioral                        |

353 since 1986, including home-range tracking using collar-mounted radio

innovations may undergo loss and reinvention<sup>47</sup>, our findings support the

372 potential intergroup spread of fish-hunting innovation via dispersing males<sup>48</sup>.

373

#### 374 Implications for hominin evolution

- 375 This study offers three main insights into the potential behavioral ecology of 376 early hominins regarding fish-hunting.
- 377 First, unlike baboons often leaving behind fish bones or skin post-feeding<sup>21</sup>,

378 Japanese macaques in Kamikochi typically consume fish entirely. Fish bones

- 379 were also visually unidentifiable even in fecal samples that later tested positive
- 380 for fish DNA via metabarcoding. As recent studies emphasize the importance of
- 381 evaluating the archaeological visibility of tool-free foraging behaviors in extant
- 382 primates<sup>49</sup>, our findings suggest that tool-free fish consumption leaves minimal
- 383 or no archaeological traces<sup>50</sup>. This implies that the contribution of fish to
- 384 hominin diets may be underestimated in the archaeological record and supports
- 385 the hypothesis that fish consumption was more widespread than previously
- thought, possibly predating the earliest known evidence of fish use by hominins

387 at 1.95 million years ago<sup>10</sup>.

| 388 | Second, transitions between foraging on aquatic insects and plants and the                             |
|-----|--|
| 389 | exploration phase of fish-hunting were observed to occur fluidly without clear                         |
| 390 | behavioral boundaries. This supports the hypothesis that the consumption of                            |
| 391 | more readily accessible aquatic organisms, such as aquatic insects and plants,                         |
| 392 | may have served as a preadaptive stage from which tool-free fish-hunting                               |
| 393 | behavior subsequently emerged <sup>51</sup> . Stable carbon isotope analyses of pedogenic              |
| 394 | carbonates, isotopic reconstruction of diet from tooth enamel, and taxonomic                           |
| 395 | frequencies of bovids suggest that hominin activities happened in woodland                             |
| 396 | grasslands, grassland–woodland mosaics, and shrublands along riverine valleys                          |
| 397 | within humid savanna biomes rich in C <sub>4</sub> grasses and herbaceous vegetation <sup>1</sup> . In |
| 398 | such ecologically diverse and riverine environments, fish-hunting may have                             |
| 399 | developed as a routinized behavior in early hominins, without requiring tool use                       |
| 400 | or cooperation, following the acquisition of more easily accessible aquatic                            |
| 401 | organisms such as aquatic insects and plants. The observation of predispersal                          |
| 402 | individuals (juveniles) performing fish-hunting suggests potential behavioral                          |
| 403 | transmission across groups via dispersing individuals, facilitating the spread and                     |
| 404 | maintenance of the behavior.   |

| 405 | Finally, our findings challenge two influential hypotheses concerning the                  |
|-----|--|
| 406 | evolution of sex foraging differences. One hypothesis suggests that sex                    |
| 407 | differences in aquatic resource exploitation exist in the hominin lineage <sup>9</sup> .   |
| 408 | Another proposes that sex differences in hunting preceded the emergence of                 |
| 409 | the human sexual division of labor <sup>30</sup> . In contrast to these ideas, we found no |
| 410 | significant sex differences in fish-hunting among adult male and female                    |
| 411 | Japanese macaques. Existing data on fish consumption in nonhuman primates                  |
| 412 | also show no consistent patterns of sex differences. Our findings therefore                |
| 413 | suggest that female primates, including humans, are not universally risk-averse            |
| 414 | even in foraging contexts that involve unpredictable outcomes, such as hunting.            |
| 415 | Accordingly, hunting—particularly fish-hunting—may not inherently exhibit sex-             |
| 416 | based differences.   |

| 417 | a Ava  | vilak | sili | i+v/ |
|-----|--------|-------|------|------|
| 41/ | .a Avc | mar   | וווע | ιιy  |

| 418 | The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available          |
|-----|---|
| 419 | from the corresponding author on reasonable request. Video recordings used          |
| 420 | for behavioral analyses are not publicly available due to file size limitations and |
| 421 | copyright considerations, but are available from the corresponding author upon      |
| 422 | reasonable request.   |
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**Author contributions** 

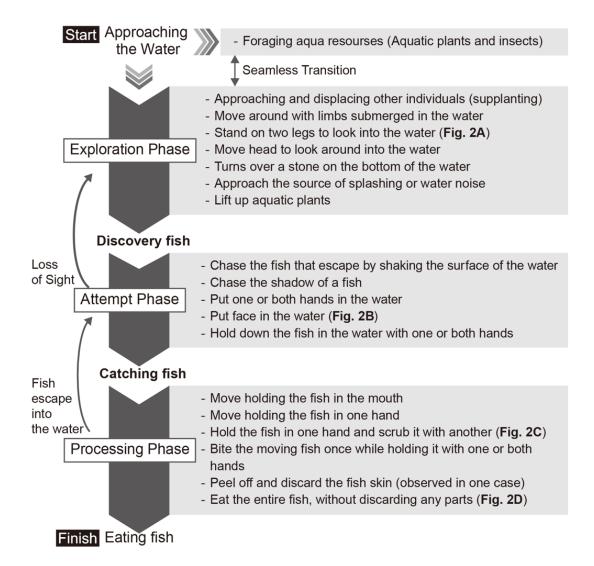
| 579 | A.T., T.M., and M.T. conceived the study and designed the project. A.T.             |
|-----|---|
| 580 | analyzed behavioral data. A.T. and T.M. analyzed the dataset. A.T., T.M., E.N.,     |
| 581 | K.H., G.Y., T.O., M.I., and S.I. conducted fieldwork and collected data. T.M. wrote |
| 582 | the first draft of the manuscript. A.T., T.M., E.N., M.T., and K.T. reviewed and    |
| 583 | edited the manuscript.  |
| 584 |   |
| 585 | Competing interests   |
| 586 | The authors declare no conflicts of interest.                                       |
| 587 |   |
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#### 593 **■Figure legends**

## 594 Figure 1. Sequential phases and associated behaviors in fish-hunting by

#### 595 Japanese macaques



596

597 The fish-hunting sequence comprises exploration, attempt, and processing

598 phases. Macaques entered the exploration phase either directly or after foraging

| 599 | aquatic plants and insects. Transitions were often seamless. Exploration involved |
|-----|---|
| 600 | looking into the water, turning over stones, and supplanting others. Upon         |
| 601 | detecting fish, macaques moved to the attempt phase, which included chasing,      |
| 602 | reaching into the water, or placing the face in the water. In the processing      |
| 603 | phase, fish were handled with the mouth or hands and usually consumed             |
| 604 | entirely. In rare cases, fish escaped, or the skin was peeled and discarded. The  |
| 605 | behaviors shown in Figs. 2A–2C are noted in parentheses.                          |
| 606 |   |

# 607 Figure 2. Representative behaviors observed during fish-hunting



- 608 (A) An adult male inspects the water in a shallow stream during the exploration
- 609 phase, standing with its hindlimbs submerged.
- 610



- 611 (B) An adult male places its face in the water to catch fish, a behavior
- 612 characteristic of the attempt phase.
- 613

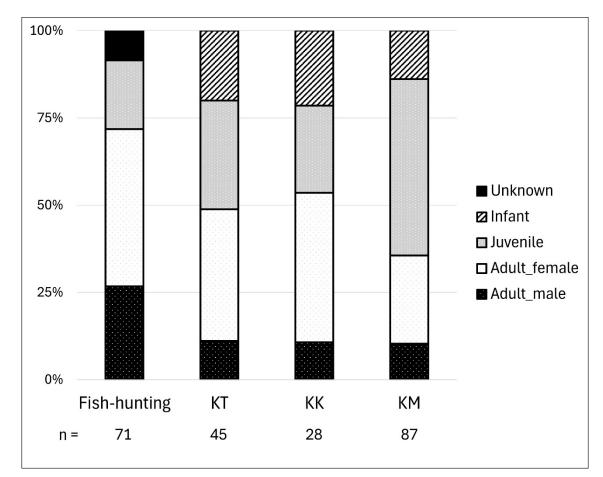


614 (C) An adult female holds a captured fish simultaneously in the mouth and615 both hands during the processing phase.

All images are still frames extracted from video footage filmed by NHK in

617 Kamikochi, Japan.

## 619 Figure 3. Composition of sex and age classes for fish-hunting events and



# 620 group members

The left bar shows the proportion of sex and age classes in 71 documented fishhunting events. The three right bars show the group composition of adult males, adult females, juveniles, and infants in the KT, KK, and KM groups (n = 45, 28, and 87 individuals, respectively). Individuals with an unconfirmed identity were categorized as "Unknown" in fish-hunting events.

| Primate species | Wild or       | Sex    | Adult | Place       | Hand  | Tool | Fish      | Fish species                 | Reference                        |
|-----------------|---------------|--------|-------|-------------|-------|------|-----------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                 | captive       |        | or    |             | catch | use  | condition |                              |                                  |
|                 |               |        | young |             |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
| Macaca fuscata  | wild          | both   | both  | flowing     | Yes   | No   | live      | Salmonidae, Rhynchocypris    | This study; Milner et al., 2021; |
|                 |               |        |       | river, pool |       |      |           | lagowskii steindachneri      | Takenaka et al., 2022            |
|                 | free-ranging, | both   | both  | seashore    | No    | No   | dead      | Lateolabrax japonicus (Asian | Leca et al., 2007; Watanabe      |
|                 | provisioned   |        |       |             |       |      |           | temperate sea bass), sardins | 1989                             |
| Allenopithecus  | wild          | *      | *     | pool        | Yes   | No   | live      | *                            | Zeeve 1985                       |
| nigroviridis    |               |        |       |             |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
| Cercopithecus   | wild          | *      | *     | pool        | Yes   | No   | live      | *                            | Zeeve 1985                       |
| neglectus       |               |        |       |             |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
| Macaca          | wild          | female | Adult | pool or     | Yes   | No   | live      | unid. sp.(Teleostei)         | Stewart et al., 2008             |
| fascicularis    |               |        |       | very slow   |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
|                 |               |        |       | river       |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
| Otolemur        | captive       | both   | adult | glass       | Yes   | No   | live      | Xiphophorus sp.              | Welker 1976                      |
| crassicaudatus  |               |        |       |             |       |      |           |                              |                                  |
| Papio anubis    | wild          | both   | both  | lakeshore   | No    | No   | dead      | Stolothrissa tanganicae      | Matsumoto-Oda and Collins,       |
|                 |               |        |       |             |       |      |           | (dagaa, Tanaganian sardine), | 2016                             |
|                 |               |        |       |             |       |      |           | Boulengero microlepis (Kuhe) |                                  |
| Papio ursinus   | wild          | both   | both  | pool        | Yes   | Yes  | live      | Sarotherodon mossambicus     | Hamilton et al., 1976; Hamilton  |
|                 |               |        |       |             |       |      |           | (tilapia), Cyprinus carpio   | and Tilson, 1985                 |

Table 1. Fish-catching and consumption by non-human primates

|                                  |                               |      |       |                    |     |     |      | (common carp), <i>Barbus</i><br>anoplus (chubby head carp)   |   |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-------|--------------------|-----|-----|------|--|---|
| Pan paniscus <sup>a</sup>        | wild                          | *    | *     | pool               | Yes | No  | live | "mud fish," sp. unid.  | Nishida 1972                                      |
| Pan troglodytes <sup>a</sup>     | wild                          | *    | *     | pool               | Yes | No  | live | "small fish," sp. unid.  | Sugiyama and Koman, 1987                          |
| Pongo<br>pygmaeus                | free-ranging,<br>rehabilitant | both | young | pool,<br>riverbank | Yes | Yes | live | sheath catfish ( <i>Kryptopterus</i><br>spp., <i>Ompok</i> spp, <i>Wallago<br/>leeri</i> ), snakeheads<br>( <i>Channa</i> sp.) | Russon et al., 2014                               |
| Sapajus apella                   | captive                       | both | both  | pool?*             | Yes | Yes | live | *  | Clarke and Mitchell, 1982;<br>Mendes et al., 2000 |
| Tarsius<br>bancanus <sup>b</sup> | free-ranging                  | *    | *     | *                  | No  | No  | dead | unid. spp.(Actinopterygii)   | Niemitz, 1979; Niemitz 1984                       |
| Tarsius syrichta                 | captive                       | *    | *     | pool               | Yes | No  | live | "small fish," sp. unid.  | Cook, 1939  |

\* No description

a Information gathered from field assistants

b "when being fed a fish liked to eat the dead fish completely"