
The ecology of wild zebra finch song – why do they sing?

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The zebra finch *Taeniopygia guttata* is the most studied songbird in the lab but the functions of their song in the wild, Australia's arid zone, remain unclear. Like many songbirds, male zebra finches sing to attract a female. However, unlike the typically studied songbirds, zebra finches are nomadic birds that live in fission-fusion societies. They pair early in life (sometimes <100 days) and have extremely faithful monogamous relations. Nevertheless, males sing throughout their life. So why do zebra finches sing? In this talk I present data collected at Fowlers Gap Arid Zone Research Station in New South Wales, Australia, home of the world's only nest box breeding population of zebra finches. Using advanced audio recording techniques and standard behavioural observations, I show that zebra finches sing uncharacteristically soft and that they sing in a variety of contexts, such as in groups at social areas. By studying this lab 'supermodel' in the wild, where it evolved, this research may bridge the gap between our understanding of this species in the lab and birdsong in general, already one of the best studied model systems for animal communication.