

Young birds help out at home

Young birds from a previous breeding season help their parents raise the new brood, defend the territory and protect the nest from predators, shows a bird study in Swaziland.

The limited availability of territory plays a key role in the social behaviour of the birds that were studied, which included the mousebird and the helmetsrike.

‘If a young bird helps out with the nest and defence duties, that increases its chance of inheriting a high-quality territory,’ says researcher Sjouke Kingma of Behavioural Ecology. The young birds also feed the chicks, sometimes even with their own food. Kingma: ‘That social behaviour benefits them as once a bird inherits the territory, it will in turn get help from the younger birds it once helped raise.’

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