

## 18. The social context of zebra finch song in the wild

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Zebra finches are the most studied songbirds in a laboratory context. This has resulted in a wealth of knowledge on mechanistic and developmental aspects of birdsong. On the contrary, our understanding of the ecological aspects of their song in the natural environment is severely understudied, which impedes our understanding of how the zebra finch model compares with other songbirds. Zebra finches sing to attract a partner and they do this early in life. Yet, male zebra finches sing throughout their life. Therefore, most of a male finch's song is produced after pair formation, but the function of this song remains unclear as they do not hold territories and they have very low rates of extra pair paternity in the wild. By combining several observational methods with a unique large-scale playback experiment in the wild, I aim to lay a strong knowledge base on zebra finch song in the natural environment with which previous lab findings can be interpreted while also opening new avenues for research. I will present findings that show that the social context of wild zebra finch song seems to be a key component of zebra finch song ecology and discuss which potential functions this may indicate. Additionally, this social component as such is markedly different from many of the northern temperate songbirds that are well-represented in the songbird literature, which raises the question of how representative the prime songbird model in the lab is or how well the current songbird literature represents the variety seen in natural systems.