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Birds that smell better produce more offspring

By [Timothy Martinez Jr.](#) | Published [September 6, 2013](#)



Image by Sebastian Crump

Throughout the animal kingdom, scents play a huge part in finding and attracting the perfect mate. But for years, scientists have always scoffed at the idea that birds use smell for anything—until now.

[According to a new study](#), birds use odor-causing chemicals to find mates and decide which males would make more suitable fathers. In other terms, better-smelling birds get the girls.

A few months back, I answered a question about [whether or not birds have a sense of smell](#). The simple answer was yes, but it's difficult to find out what exactly they use it for and to what extent. Well, nothing stands in the way of science.

The scientists in the study found that when birds preen, they don't just do it to clean their

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feathers. They also spread odor-causing secretions from their glands over their feathers.

It's impossible to actually tell how much of it birds smell, but its presence predominately in breeding seasons points to its use in finding a mate.

While we always believed that plumage was a good indicator of a male's chance at reproducing and overall healthiness, the study found that the strength of odor was actually a better indicator of reproductive success. Here's more from [researcher Danielle Whittaker](#):

“This study shows a strong connection between the way birds smell near the beginning of the breeding season — when birds are choosing mates — and their reproductive success for the entire season,” she said. “Simply put, males that smell more ‘male-like’ and females that smell more ‘female-like’ have higher genetic reproductive success.”

There's still a lot more to discover from this interesting finding, but it just goes to show that there are tons of things we can still learn about the world.



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