

Breaking Story

Birds choose sweet-smelling mates



For most animals, scent is the instant messenger of choice for quickly exchanging personal profiles. Scientists, however, have long dismissed birds as odor-eschewing Luddites that don't take advantage of scent-based communications. In a first-of-its-kind study, however, a research team has demonstrated that birds do indeed communicate via scents, and that odor reliably predicts their reproductive success. The study focuses on volatile compounds in avian preen secretions. Birds' preen glands are located near their tails. Using their beaks, birds extract oil from the glands and rub it on their feathers and legs.

Historically, this activity was thought to simply bolster the strength of feathers. The research team, however, has shown that the preen glands play a key role in signaling reproductive health.

Visit Website > (<http://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2013/birds-choose-sweet-smelling-mates/#sthash.njXP0BBI.dpuf>)

Image credit: Nicole Gerlach, Michigan State University