



Our thermal cyclers are designed for consistent results
Find out more

life
technologies

nature

International weekly journal of science

Search Go

Advanced search

Home | News & Comment | Research | Careers & Jobs | Current Issue | Archive | Audio & Video | For Authors

Archive | Volume 522 | Issue 7554 | Research Highlights | Article

Take part in Nature Publishing Group's annual reader survey here for the chance to win a Macbook Air. Find out more

NATURE | RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

EVOLUTION

Migration explains drab female birds

Nature 522, 9 (04 June 2015) | doi:10.1038/522009a
Published online 03 June 2015

PDF Citation Reprints Rights & permissions Article metrics

Subject terms: Evolution · Zoology

Some female warblers lost their bright colours just as the birds were evolving to become migratory, suggesting that this behavioural change spurred the evolution of sex differences in plumage colour.



Left: Frode Jacobsen; Right: Glenn Bartley/BIA/Minden Pictures/Corbis

To find out why female songbirds are often as colourful as the males in tropical species but less colourful in northern ones, Troy Murphy at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and his colleagues studied 108 species of wood warblers (*Setophaga tigrina*; female pictured left, male pictured right). Migratory species tend to live farther north, and the authors found that the longer the bird's migration, the more distinct the sexes look. In multiple species, these sex differences evolved at around the same time as the birds first began migrating.

The findings suggest that sex differences in colour are driven by the needs of females. Non-migratory females often defend their territories using bright colours to signal fighting ability. But females that migrate rarely act in this way, and bright colours could make them more visible to predators during their migration.

Proc. R. Soc. B 282, 20150375 (2015)

More Research Highlights

VOLCANOLOGY

New islands reveal Red Sea rifting

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Gene therapy halts type 1 diabetes

MATERIALS

Memory metal sets flex record

PALAEOCLIMATOLOGY

Tropics feel effect of iceberg thaw

CHEMICAL BIOLOGY

Antifungal drug dodges resistance

NEUROSCIENCE

Stroke brain still controls device

CLIMATE-CHANGE BIOLOGY

Warming threat to ocean biodiversity

ECOLOGY

Coral faces algal sabotage

Scientists offer advice

on how best to respond to reviewers

nature REVIEWS ENDOCRINOLOGY

Nature Reviews Endocrinology presents a collection on noncoding RNAs in endocrinology

Access the collection online

Editors' pick



When DARPA meets biology: the US defence agency is tackling biomedical research but scientists wonder if its high-risk approach can work. >

Science jobs

Science events

naturejobs.com

Faculty Positions Available in Southwest University
SOUTHWEST UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN / Gastroenterology Opportunity near Ann Arbor
Allegiance Health

Quality Assurance Manager
NonStop Pharma Recruitment

Post a job | More science jobs >

Most read

Structural and functional features of central nervous system lymphatic vessels
Nature | 01 June 2015

Let's have a talk
Nature | 03 June 2015

Human body epigenome maps reveal noncanonical DNA methylation variation
Nature | 01 June 2015

nature.com open innovation pavilion

Markers of Transduction and Gene Expression Compatible with Ocular Gene Therapy

Deadline: Jun 20 2015

Reward: \$45,000 USD

The concept of gene therapy arose decades ago, when researchers postulated that human diseases could be treated by using a...

Powered by: INNOCENTIVE

View all >

nature REVIEWS DISEASE PRIMERS

NEW IN 2015



From mechanisms to management

Publishing introductory review articles—called Primers—on diseases and disorders across all medical specialties.

Nature ISSN 0028-0836 EISSN 1476-4687

About NPG
Contact NPG
Accessibility statement
Help

Privacy policy
Use of cookies
Legal notice
Terms

Naturejobs
Nature Asia
Nature Education
RSS web feeds

About Nature
Contact Nature
About the Editors
Nature awards

Search: go

npg nature publishing group

© 2015 Macmillan Publishers Limited. All Rights Reserved.
partner of AGORA, HINARI, OARE, INASP, ORCID, CrossRef and COUNTER