

Chickens eject sperm from males they don't fancy

August 25 2011



While sexual coercion is common in fowl, females are able to exert a strong influence on fertilization by differentially dumping sperm of individual males.
Credit: Tommaso Pizzari

New research finds that even though hens aren't terribly picky about their mates, they are picky about whose sperm makes it to the egg.

Female domestic chickens generally mate with multiple males and are known to sometimes eject sperm following mating encounters.

It was unclear, however, whether the sperm ejection was a consequence

of receiving a large amount of ejaculate, or because hens are actively trying to rid themselves of undesirable sperm.

A team led by Oxford researcher Rebecca Dean investigated the phenomenon in a group of feral chickens kept at Stockholm University in Sweden.

After controlling for ejaculate size and other factors, Dean and her colleagues found that [hens](#) ejected a larger proportion of inseminations by socially subordinate males.

"These results show that promiscuous females can actively bias sperm utilization to exert a strong and predictable influence on the struggle for fertilization," Dean said. By doing so, females "retain control of [paternity](#) even in species such as fowl where males can force mating."

More information: Rebecca Dean, Shinichi Nakagawa, and Tommaso Pizzari, "The Risk and Intensity of Sperm Ejection in Female Birds.", *American Naturalist*, September 2011.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Chickens eject sperm from males they don't fancy (2011, August 25) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-chickens-eject-sperm-males-dont.html>

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