

Bold male birds fall faster and harder for their partners

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Great Tit with Radio-frequency identification (RFID) Credit: Molly Harwood

Research from Oxford University has revealed that bold male birds

focus on forming strong relationships with their future breeding partners while shy male birds play the field.

A new study from the Department of Zoology, Oxford University, has found that the individual personalities of male [great tits](#) influences how they bond with their future breeding partner.

The bolder, more proactive, males choose their future partners sooner, as well as putting more effort into their [relationship](#) before the [breeding season](#) begins. Shy males are less devoted to forming a strong pair bond, and instead spend more of their time flocking with other females.

The findings, published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, demonstrate how individual differences in behaviour can shape the formation of crucial social relationships in the wild.

Dr. Josh Firth, who led the research, said: "Finding a mating partner is of utmost importance to these birds, just as it is for many species across the animal kingdom. We wanted to ask why individuals of the same species differ so much in how much effort they put into forming these relationships."

The research, which was carried out at Oxford University's Wytham Woods, assessed the personalities of hundreds of individual wild great tits, and then used radio-frequency identification tags to track the birds' social networks over multiple years.

Dr. Firth added: "We show that personality plays an important role explaining the differences in pair-bonding tactics; proactive males dedicate more time to their chosen future partner, even long before mating begins, while the less proactive [males](#) take the alternative option of sampling lots of different females right up until the breeding season actually starts."

"Through linking differences in male bird's behaviour to different mating strategies, the findings suggest there may be no 'best [personality](#)' to have, and therefore help explain why we even see these differences in personalities in the first place. It could well be the case that being bold and proactive is better for finding a good [partner](#) in some social situations, while more reserved strategies are preferable in others."

The researchers hope that the findings will promote more studies into how individual behavioural differences can shape social relationships across many species, and what consequences this might have for the structure of societies.

More information: Josh A. Firth et al, Personality shapes pair bonding in a wild bird social system, *Nature Ecology & Evolution* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-018-0670-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-018-0670-8)

Provided by University of Oxford

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