A team of researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology and California Polytechnic State University, has found that the broken wing tactic used by some birds to lure predators away from their nest is more widespread than previously thought. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, the group analyzed data from multiple sources to learn more about the prevalence of the broken wing tactic.

Biologists have known about the broken wing tactic for more than 100 years, but its extent has never been thoroughly studied. What is known is that many members of bird species feign injury when predators approach their nest, hoping that they will be followed. Once they are a safe distance from the nest, the bird flies to safety.

The work by the team involved searching for papers written about the broken wing tactic using Web of Science, Google Scholar and the Handbook of Birds of the World and building a database of findings. They carried out filtered requests that highlighted information about the tactic and found that it is more widespread than previously known—they found it in 52 bird families (and 13 orders) in nearly 300 species. They suggest this finding indicates that the tactic evolved independently multiple times.

The researchers then looked for characteristics of the birds that use the tactic to see if they could spot commonalities. They found eight variables that they could associate with the broken wing tactic or feigning an injury. Most notably, they found that it was more common as species lived farther from the equator, suggesting that the behavior was related to shorter incubation periods. They also found it was more common in dense environments and where there was relatively little ground cover to hide the presence of a nest.

The researchers acknowledge that their study was limited by the availability of data and that it is likely that the broken wing tactic is used by more kinds of birds than they were able to identify.
