# Oxford study reveals birds develop local song cultures and accents like humans



Scientists at Oxford University have revealed that birds possess local song cultures and develop distinct "accents" much like humans do. Their study, which analysed over 100,000 birds, has found that the songs birds sing vary depending on where they live, how they move, and the age of the individuals within their groups.

The research demonstrated that birds do not inherit their songs genetically, but rather learn them from each other, forming unique regional variations in their calls. Younger birds were also observed to introduce new song styles, analogous to how human teenagers popularise new genres of music among their peers and family.

Lead researcher Dr Nilo Merino Recalde explained: “We were excited to find clear evidence that the movements and life histories of individual birds actively shape the songs they sing.” The study identified that birds which travelled greater distances and readily integrated newcomers into their flocks developed a more diverse range of songs. This dynamic is comparable to folk singing traditions in human societies, where melodies and lyrics are passed along and mutated through communal sharing.

Furthermore, the researchers discovered that when birds leave a population or die, many of their song types disappear as well. Conversely, young birds that replace them can accelerate the emergence and spread of new song variants, enhancing the variety of local bird "music."

The team focused on great tits in Oxfordshire, noting that their singing habits changed in relation to their age and patterns of movement. This species learns songs socially rather than inheriting them biologically, a trait that enables the evolution of local song cultures.

Writing in Countyfile magazine, contributor Graeme Green highlighted that this phenomenon closely mirrors how human communities develop distinct dialects and musical traditions. He said: “The study found that when birds mix more, through increased local dispersal and the arrival of immigrants, they tend to adopt more common songs but learn more songs overall, enriching the music scene. Areas where birds stay close to their birthplace maintain more unique homegrown song cultures, similar to how isolated human communities often develop distinct dialects or musical styles.”

Dr Recalde added that the study “provides real-world evidence” supporting the idea that factors such as a bird’s age and movement patterns play a “key role in shaping the songs we hear in bird populations.”

The findings open new perspectives on animal communication and cultural transmission, indicating that bird song is a dynamic and locally adapted form of expression influenced by social behaviour and ecological context.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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3. <https://phys.org/news/2025-03-chorus-movements-memories-birdsong-evolution.html> - This report discusses the study's methodology and findings regarding how birds' movements and ages affect song diversity. It mentions the use of AI to identify individual birds by their songs and track changes in local song cultures.
4. <https://juliaflynnsiler.com/2025/03/27/how-birdsong-evolves-in-the-footsteps-of-an-oxford-biologist/> - This piece delves into Dr. Nilo Merino Recalde's work on bird song evolution, emphasizing how individual birds' movements shape cultural learning and song diversity within populations.
5. <https://academic.oup.com/aosjournals/pages/bird_song> - Although the page is experiencing issues, it generally covers bird song development and its various aspects, which are relevant to understanding avian vocalizations and their evolutionary dynamics.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source, although not directly linked to bird song research, represents the media platform where such studies might be reported. It could contain articles discussing the findings and implications of bird song evolution studies.
7. <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/birds-accents-learn-songs-each-35075548> - Please view link - unable to able to access data