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Vulnerable but not helpless: parent-offspring communication and the risk of predation

Thursday 22 March 2012 1 – 2pm

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Gould Seminar Room (Room 235), Building 116, Daley Road, ANU



Acoustic signaling is an important way that animals communicate, but making signals conspicuous to intended receivers can also make them easily detectable to eavesdropping predators. Parent-offspring communication in birds offers a superb window into how animals communicate under the risk of predation, as most species rely upon vocal signaling and young are vulnerable to predators. I asked three central questions:

- (1) do nestling calls actually attract predators?;
- (2) how do parents warn young of danger without betraying nest location to predators?; and
- (3) how do young reduce predation risk independently of parents?

I show that vocalizations by scrubwren young are indeed risky, that parents use strategic trade-offs when deciding whether to warn young, and that young learn to use a diverse range of cues about danger.

Presented by

Research School
of Biology
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