

## EVOLUTION, ECOLOGY, & GENETICS RESEARCH SCHOOL OF BIOLOGY

Thursday 24 March 2011, 1pm



Nestling begging and  
animal communication:  
using little birds to tackle  
big questions

Professor Marty Leonard

Department of Biology  
Dalhousie University, Canada

Animal signals are amazingly diverse in both their form and function. Peacocks spread their tails to tell females about their quality as a mate, red deer roar to tell rivals about their strength, and young cuckoos gape and call to tell host parents about their need for food. Why would selection favour such an apparently cumbersome and costly trait as the peacock's tail? Do red deer bluff about their strength? How are host parents manipulated into providing food? These questions raise fundamental issues about the evolution of animal signals.

In my talk, I will address four themes in animal communication using field experiments on signaling between nestling tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) and their parents. These experiments show how honesty and manipulation, signal costs, receiver error and selection for signal efficacy shape the conspicuous begging signals used by nestling birds and, in turn, contribute to our understanding of the general principles explaining signal variation.

For further info please contact:

Prof William Foley, 02 6125 2866, [William.Foley@anu.edu.au](mailto:William.Foley@anu.edu.au)

**Seminars are held in the Gould Wing Seminar Room, Building 116 Daley Rd, ANU  
ALL STAFF AND STUDENTS ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND**