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Low-profile singers of the animal world!

Listen and learn about these up-and-coming mammal musicians

MULTIMEDIA: MUSICAL CREATURES



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- **Canary:** Listen to a computer-generated song after a short pause, a young male canary to copy. Lastly, enjoy a traditional canary love song.
- **Bat:** Listen to a male Mexican free-tailed bat serenade. Normally ultrasonic, meaning too high frequency for human ears to pick up; the pitch has been slowed down so you can hear it.
- **Humpback whale:** Listen to the song of a male humpback whale. Their female counterpart and it's unclear why males do: Maybe for long distance navigation of the ocean.
- **Mice:** Listen to four mouse melodies, separated by "thumps." So you can hear these ultrasonic pitches. The first tune was slowed down for the first time and the remaining three.

Play

By Jasmin Aline Persch

MSNBC

updated 4:28 p.m. ET, Tues., April. 29, 2008

Female canaries adore a good old-fashioned love song that abides by rigid musical rules. Mature males always follow the rules. Curiously, young males will go against convention — and rock out to tunes that would not impress the ladies.

But the feathery punks will shape up when it

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counts. In a study by scientists at Rockefeller University in New York City, young male canaries isolated in soundproof cages learned to imitate computer-generated compositions in the first half of their youth.

Come spring mating season, they changed their tune to the good old-fashioned canary love song — even though they'd never heard it before.

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The Rockefeller University researchers were surprised the young male canaries broke steadfast tradition. But the quick turnaround to the conventional emphasizes how crucial the recognizable canary love song is to coupling. It encourages females to build nests, produce eggs and find a soul mate.

Scientists continue to decipher birdsong. They're also studying the musical talents of apes, humpback whales, bats and mice. Listen (above) and learn (below) about these up-and-coming mammal musicians.

Love, danger inspire ape song

In Thailand's forests, white-handed gibbons sing to tip off peers to predators. The warning song was cited for the first time among non-human primates in a 2006 report in the science journal PLoS One.

Here, a wild gibbon sings in August 2005 at Khao Yai National Park in Thailand, as observed by a team of scientists from St. Andrews in Scotland and Max Planck Institute in Germany.

The tree dwellers stand out in their ability to



Esther Clarke / AP

communicate through complex songs. They were already known to catcall to attract mates or endorse coupling.

To test the apes' response to danger, scientists displayed models of predators including pythons, snow leopards and crested serpent eagles.

The gibbons approached the predators, then belted out "wahs, wows and hoos." Fellow apes overheard and chimed in — as researchers recorded the musical call outs.

Much like gangsta rap differs from sappy pop, the cautionary melodies of gibbons were harsher than the romantic ones. Scientists highlighted that the apes' ability to vary meaning by restructuring their songs is much like we communicate by choosing our words.

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Surprised these creatures sing? Your favorite songster?

Why do male humpbacks sing?

Adult humpback whales are the only non-human mammals to modify their sounds. Males were long believed to change their songs to woo the ladies with the trendiest tune, partly because females generally aren't musical.

But scientists were thrown off when male whales broke out into song outside their winter mating season — during springtime when they're supposed to have food (not hanky-panky) on the brain.



Itsuo Inouye / AP file

Humpback whales — one is shown here jumping near Okinawa in southwestern Japan — generally sing alone but also to single females, often ones with calves. (Calves make sounds, too, to communicate with their mothers, but the grunts aren't as complex as the repetitive, grammatical songs of adults.)

A new study by researchers at State University of New York in Buffalo suggested humpbacks, which are known to have dialects, learn the tunes of local whales on their undersea escapades.

As they move on to new locales, they can determine where they are compared to other humpbacks by matching distorted songs to the ones they learned and determine the distance the sounds traveled, the research maintains. The question remains: Do humpbacks sing for love — or to navigate the vast ocean?

Female mice urine inspires males' songs

Scientists have long known that a female mouse, her pheromones — or pee — can illicit squeaks in males, which scientists believe are wooing potential mates.

But in 2005, mice were added to the short list of mammal singers. Singers are distinguished from noise makers by the diversity of sound, rather than just one sound, and repeated themes.

Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis discovered the musical talents of mice. They modified mouse twitter, which is ultrasonic (too high frequency for human ears to pick up), so they could listen — and heard birdlike singing.



Everett Kennedy Brown / EPA file

Scientists may now study mice song, as they have with birdsong, to develop human treatments for communication disorders such as autism. Here, house mice eat European-style whole grain bread at a zoo in Tokyo.

Talented bat singers get more girls

Male bats with better singing voices attract more ladies. Scientists from the University of Maryland observed that greater white-lined bat males who could carry more complicated tunes (with more syllables) scored more females — up to eight — in their territories.

While a male bat would sweetly sing to females in a baby (bat) voice, he would also jealously screech at love rivals encroaching on his turf, chase them away — and even nip at them. Sometimes male bats will duke it out over a female — baring their teeth and bobbing their heads.



Texas A&M University

Shown is a Mexican free-tailed bat, which have ultrasonic songs. Researchers at Texas A&M University study how these bats organize their syllables to learn more about how human brains create speech and language.

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