

Research With Snowball

Snowball, the dancing cockatoo, was recently in the news as part of ground-breaking research.

Aniruddh Patel, Ph.D. (pictured with Snowball) and study co-author John Iversen, Ph.D. are presenting their Snowball research at the "Society of Music Perception and Cognition Conference" in Indiana summer 2009 and hope to visit Snowball while in town.

BIRD TALK talked with Aniruddh Patel, Ph.D, Senior Fellow in Theoretical Neurobiology at the Neurosciences Institute in San Diego, who co-authored a ground breaking study to see if animals are capable of synchronized rhythmic movement. He co-authored the study with Research Fellow John R. Iversen, Ph.D.

Patel had written a theoretical paper proposing that the "ability to move to a beat grew out of the ability to imitate sounds." He saw a video of Snowball, which supported his theory (after all, parrots like to mimic sounds!). After contacting Irena Schulz, at Bird Lovers Only Rescue Service, Inc, Patel and Iversen decided to test to see if Snowball could dance at differing speeds.

From YouTube Info: The movie shows three excerpts of videos analyzed in this experiment. Each excerpt is at a tempo different from the original song ("Everybody," by the Backstreet Boys; 108.7 beats per minute [bpm]). The excerpts include synchronized bouts, periods during which Snowball bobs his head in synchrony with the musical beat for at least 12 consecutive bobs. *Current Biology* 19(10), published online April 30, 2009.

With Snowball's study, it proves that people aren't the only ones who can dance. Patel wants to continue his study, to see if there is a social aspect in dancing with Snowball, parrots and other birds, especially song birds.