

Ladies' Choice

Female mate choices became less consistent when the birds were under low-frequency fluorescent lights

Female European starlings' mate choices became less consistent when the birds were under low-frequency (LF) fluorescent lights (120hz), which produce a flicker that birds might be able to perceive, according to researchers from the Center for Behavioral Biology at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom. While under high-frequency (HF) fluorescent lighting (10Khz or higher), which makes the flicker imperceptible, the females all chose similar mates, but they did not agree on the best mates when under LF light.

"Since HF light is more similar to natural light, we would predict that the choices made by females under HF would be more representative of those of wild birds," said Jennifer Evans, one of the study's authors.

Evans said further study is necessary to determine the reason behind the females' choices, but she hypothesized that stress from being under LF lighting caused "a reduction in the birds' attention and motivation." In short, they became less "choosy." Or, it's possible that the flicker impaired the birds' eyesight, Evans added. "Background flicker impairs the discrimination abilities of humans ... We hypothesize that a similar response may also occur in birds," she said.

The study was published in August 2006 issue of Animal Behavior.