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The secret sense - olfactory communication in birds

Birds in general and songbirds in particular are primarily known for their elaborate songs and/or conspicuous plumage coloration but not for their sense of smell. Birds, however, do not only use olfactory cues for foraging and orientation but also use information originating from body odors for social communication. Zebra finches for example have a species-specific odor profile and are able to recognise conspecifics based on olfactory cues alone. Recent experiments show that odours play an important role in parent-offspring communication, e.g. zebra finches recognise kin based on olfactory cues and that kin recognition in zebra finches is not biased by familiarity. Here, I will give an overview about the research on social olfactory communication in zebra finches and other birds.