

Unhand me!

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Animal Biology



During the spring I go out into the field and study Yellow Warblers, a small bird common in Illinois. I'm interested in how they react to different playbacks we present to them, both behaviorally and physiologically, which can be measured by taking blood samples. To band birds and take samples, we put up mist nets which the birds have a hard time seeing, and they fly into it and get caught. However, all kinds of birds fly around our field site so sometimes we get bycatch, which is always interesting because you get to hold a new species for the first time. This Tree Swallow male was chasing a female swallow when they both landed right into the net. This male was very grumpy about the situation but resumed chasing his female after they were released. You'll notice that the feet of this bird barely extend beyond the grasp of our hand. That's because swallows are birds who spend almost all their time on the wing eating insects, and thus their legs have become short and stubby over time making them difficult to get a grip on!