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Alexis S. Chaine

Station d'Ecologie Expérimentale du CNRS à Moulis, France, alexis.chaine@ecoex-moulis.cnrs.fr

Allison M. Roth

University of California, Santa Cruz

Daizaburo Shizuka

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, dshizuka2@unl.edu

Bruce E. Lyon

University of California, Santa Cruz, belyon@ucsc.edu

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Experimental confirmation that avian plumage traits function as multiple status signals in winter contests

Alexis S. Chaine,¹ Allison M. Roth,^{2,3} Daizaburo Shizuka,^{2,4} and Bruce E. Lyon²

1. Station d'Ecologie Expérimentale du CNRS, USR2936, Moulis, France

2. Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

3. Cincinnati, OH, USA

4. School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA

Corresponding author — A. S. Chaine, Station d'Ecologie Expérimentale du CNRS, USR2936, 09200 Moulis, France, email alexis.chaine@ecoex-moulis.cnrs.fr

Abstract

Status signals are thought to reduce costs of overt conflict over resources by advertising social status or an individual's ability to win contests. While most studies have focused on single badges of status, recent empirical work has shown that multiple status signals may exist. To provide robust evidence for multiple badges of status, an experimental manipulation is required to decouple signals from one another and from other traits linked to fighting ability. Such experimental evidence is lacking for most studies of multiple status signals to date. We previously found that two plumage traits in golden-crowned sparrows, *Zonotrichia atricapilla*, were correlated with social dominance in encounters between unfamiliar individuals. To confirm that each plumage patch functions as an independent status signal, we experimentally augmented the sizes of the gold crown patch and the black crown patch during encounters between unfamiliar individuals with similar premanipulation crown sizes. In nearly all cases, the individual with the artificially augmented gold or black crown was dominant during the trial and manipulations of each color were equally successful in conferring dominance. The relative differences in crown sizes between manipulated and unmanipulated individuals in a dyad and mismatches in crown sizes of the manipulated bird led to escalation in gold trials, but these same factors were not significant for black trials. This study provides unequivocal evidence for multiple status signals: both black and gold crown patches influence social status per se and they do so independently of the other crown patch.

Keywords: carotenoid, experimental, golden-crowned sparrow, manipulation, melanin, multiple signals, social dominance, status signal, winter sociality, *Zonotrichia atricapilla*

Physical conflict over limited resources can be costly in terms of both time and health. These costs can favor the evolution of signals that can resolve conflicts without physical aggression, namely “status signals” or “badges of status” (Rohwer, 1975, 1977; Maynard Smith and Harper, 2003). Numerous studies identify traits that function as status signals, in both breeding and nonbreeding contexts, and for a wide diversity of taxonomic groups (Senar, 1999, 2006; Whiting et al., 2003; Tibbetts and Safran, 2009). Nearly all studies of status signals to date have focused on investigating a single trait or badge that indicates dominance in a given species (Senar, 2006; Tibbetts and Safran, 2009), in contrast to multiple signals. This may be due to the assumption that status signals should be directly linked to fighting ability and that a single badge should be sufficient to convey this information. In contrast, studies of traits selected through mate choice have focused on multiple signals for the past two decades (Møller and Pomiankowski, 1993; Marchetti, 1998; Andersson et al., 2002; Uetz and Roberts, 2002; Candolin, 2003; Doucet and Montgomerie, 2003; Chaine

and Lyon, 2008a; Dunn et al., 2008). In this context, receivers are thought to benefit from attending to a number of different traits that reflect different aspects of individual quality (“multiple messages”) in a mate, or if multiple cues aid in more accurate assessment of quality (“backup cues”; Marchetti, 1998; Rowe, 1999; Candolin, 2003). However, signaling in nonmating contexts should entail similar selection pressures as sexual signaling and thus could resemble sexual signals in many respects (West-Eberhard, 1983; Lyon and Montgomerie, 2012). Indeed, recent evidence from a few species suggests that multiple status signals also occur in contexts other than mate choice (Bókony et al., 2006; Chaine and Lyon, 2008b; Chaine et al., 2011) and that they could be more common than previously thought.

Status signals have been particularly well studied in birds, yet studies that investigate the function of multiple status signals are rare. In dark-eyed juncos, *Junco hyemalis* (Balph et al. 1979), two traits were found to correlate with social dominance, but it was unclear whether the two signals function dif-

ferently because this was not investigated. Multiple status signals have been identified in studies of two other species, house sparrows, *Passer domesticus* (Bókonyi et al. 2006) and golden-crowned sparrows, *Zonotrichia atricapilla* (Chaine et al. 2011), and in each study differences were found in the context of use and function of the different signal traits. However, these studies are correlative and experimental manipulation of putative badges is necessary to decouple the influence of the badge itself from that of other correlated traits that might determine dominance (Rohwer and Rohwer, 1978; Maynard Smith and Harper, 2003). This is especially important for multiple badges of status because the two signal traits might themselves be correlated. With trait correlation, one trait might serve as the badge and the second putative signal trait could show an association with dominance simply because of its phenotypic correlation with the badge. Experimental manipulation of putative multiple status signals to decouple trait correlations is therefore crucial to determine whether more than one signal is actually associated with social dominance.

Our previous work in golden-crowned sparrows identified multiple signals associated with winning contests over food piles during the nonbreeding season. Prior to arriving at their wintering grounds, golden-crowned sparrows molt into a winter plumage that is highly variable in the sizes of gold and black crown feather patches (they molt again prior to breeding in the spring). We showed that the two signals, the gold crown patch and black crown patch, which originate from carotenoid and melanin pigments, respectively (K. Tjernell, D. Shizuka, B. E. Lyon & A. S. Chaine, unpublished data), played different roles during escalation of a contest (Chaine et al. 2011). Gold crown patch size was associated with winning contests in which no aggressive interactions occurred (e.g. avoidance), given that the two individuals differed greatly in the signal. However, when gold crown size was similar, contests escalated to higher levels of aggression and the winner had a larger black crown patch. We concluded that these two plumage patches each served as a signal and that they function in different contexts. However, the sizes of both the gold and black crown patches are correlated with body size in this species, and bigger body size is associated with winning a contest (Chaine et al. 2011). Therefore, experimental manipulation of each color patch is necessary to determine whether gold and black crown features both function as badges of status per se. Moreover, a powerful test of the multiple signal hypothesis further requires experimentally demonstrating that each plumage patch influences social dominance independently of the other. In the present study, we experimentally manipulated the two color patches associated with dominance to test whether multiple status signals occur in this species.

Methods

Capture and Measurements of Birds

We caught golden-crowned sparrows in January and February 2007–2009 using Potter (cage) traps baited with millet at two natural feeding sites near Pogonip City Park, Santa Cruz, California. Birds were cleared from traps every 5 min and trapping only occurred during good weather so that birds would not get wet. Birds were transported from the trapping site to small aviaries in bird bags to reduce stress and placed in a small cage to prevent escape. For each bird we took standard body size measurements immediately after capture (mass, flattened wing chord, tarsus and beak length) and fitted each bird with a USFWS metal bird band and a unique combination of colored vinyl leg bands (Hill 1992). Morphological traits excluding mass were simplified into one “body size” variable using principal components analysis as in past work (Chaine and Lyon, 2008a; Chaine et al., 2011). To estimate crown patch

sizes, we took digital photographs perpendicular to the top of the head and included a ruler to scale images. We then used Adobe Photoshop to isolate and calculate the areas (mm²) of the gold and black portions of each crown by counting pixels. All morphometric and plumage measures are highly repeatable (Chaine et al. 2011).

We measured the color of the black and gold portions of each crown and manipulated crown colors to ensure that manipulations fell within the natural range of variation. We used an Ocean Optics USB2000 spectrometer and a PX-2 pulsed xenon light source and measured a 2 mm diameter area at a 45° angle (Andersson and Prager, 2006; Chaine and Lyon, 2008a, 2008b; Chaine et al., 2011).

Tests of the influence of plumage on social dominance should involve birds not previously familiar with each other so that familiarity and information from previous interactions do not confound the influence of status signals. All dominance trials therefore involved dyads of individuals from two different sites; our two sites for capturing experimental birds were over 0.5 km apart, several times farther than the home range size of individual birds (Price 1931; D. Shizuka, B. E. Lyon, & A. S. Chaine, unpublished data using telemetry). We did not determine the sex of individuals since previous results showed that social dominance is unrelated to sex (Chaine et al. 2011). Male and female crown sizes in winter show highly overlapping distributions (D. Shizuka, B. E. Lyon & A. S. Chaine, unpublished data). Moreover, the crown manipulations presented here (see below) were well within the range of both male and female natural crown sizes, limiting the possibility that perception of “sex” was altered during crown manipulation. After the dominance trials were completed, all birds were released at their respective capture sites (natural feeding areas). No birds were kept more than 36 h. Birds settled down in cages in less than 5 min, showed normal behavior and remained healthy.

Experimental Dominance Trials

After measurement, each bird was transferred to an outdoor aviary with up to three other individuals captured on the same day from the same location and flock (i.e. familiar birds were housed together). We used two holding aviaries to keep individuals from the two populations separate, and these aviaries were placed out of visual and acoustic contact from each other at the University of California Santa Cruz Arboretum. Each aviary measured 1.2 m on each side, was covered with plywood to provide shelter from direct sunlight and precipitation, and contained perches and shelter. Birds were provided with food (millet) and water *ad libitum* with two feeding trays per cage (10 cm diameter) to ensure that all birds could easily get access to food and to reduce aggression during the pre-trial period (Pryke et al. 2002). All birds were allowed to acclimate to their respective housing aviaries without disturbance for 1 day before being observed in the dominance trials.

We conducted 42 paired dominance trials to determine the influence of plumage patch size on social dominance. Birds paired in a given dominance trial were selected from the set of birds captured on the same day to ensure a similar duration of captivity. Food was removed from holding cages at sundown the night before dominance trials and all trials were conducted in the morning between 0800 and 1000 hours. The experimental aviary had the same dimensions as the housing aviaries, but to encourage interactions it contained only a single food dish (4 cm diameter) located centrally and surrounded by a small cluster of branches for perching. Birds for a given experiment were caught in their housing cages with a small sweep net and typically captured within a few minutes of each other. After manipulation (see below), the two individuals were then released simultaneously into the trial cage and observed with binoculars for 30 min from 20 m away. The experimen-

tal birds showed the same suite of behaviors we observe in the field with free-ranging individuals and we observed no signs of stress after less than 1 min of their release into the trial cage.

We conducted two experiments, manipulating (1) the size of the black crown patch and (2) the size of the gold crown patch to determine whether size of either color patch is used as a badge of status. For both experiments, the two birds for a given trial were chosen so that their focal patch sizes prior to manipulation were as similar to each other as possible, given the variation in the sample of available birds in the cages, and then one was randomly chosen for crown manipulation. Crown patch sizes prior to manipulation did not differ between the manipulated and sham birds (paired *t* test of natural crown sizes: Black: $t_{41} = -1.25$, $P = 0.22$; Gold: $t_{41} = -0.59$, $P = 0.56$); the birds did not differ in any other traits (color of gold and black patches, body size, residual mass) either (matched-pair *t* tests: $N = 42$, all $P > 0.05$). The paired design in this experiment, with one experimental and one sham individual in each trial, leads to an expected 50:50 dominance outcome since crown manipulations were randomly assigned with respect to premanipulation patch size (see Results).

Black patch size was enlarged using a black Sharpie pen and the sham treatment received markings at the edge of the crown using a brown Sharpie pen (a color that matched background plumage color). Gold patch size was enlarged using Golden Fluid Acrylic paint that was mixed to match natural gold crown color (based on spectrophotometry measures) whereas shams received Golden Open thinner on their crown. The manipulated crown colors closely resembled natural coloration of crowns (Figure 1). The gold manipulation produced UV reflectance that was within the natural range, albeit towards the lower end of the natural distribution. Furthermore, UV reflectance of the gold patch, like total reflectance, was not related to social dominance in our past work (Chaine et al. 2011; paired *t* test of UV reflectance of dominant versus subordinate: $t_{28} = 0.29$, $P = 0.77$). All manipulations dried in less than 5 min, the birds were photographed, and the size of the manipulated patch was later measured from photographs using the same technique as for natural crowns. However, we do not have size estimates for all experimental birds because some manipulated crown sizes are missing owing to low quality or loss of images (one black and seven gold crowns). Manipulated crown colors were no longer visible after 48 h on birds kept in captivity for a few days during pilot manipulation tests.

Patch size manipulations led to significantly larger patch sizes (paired *t* test; Black: $t_{18} = 10.08$, $P < 0.0001$, mean before = 46.5 mm², after = 129.6 mm²; Gold: $t_{14} = 6.43$, $P < 0.001$, mean before = 63.9 mm², after = 126.3 mm²). Manipulated crown sizes were within the distribution of natural crown

sizes in these populations (mean Natural Black = 83 mm², range Natural Black 2–285 mm², $N = 523$, Manipulated Black 76–180 mm²; mean Natural Gold = 73 mm², range Natural Gold 12–217 mm², $N = 522$, Manipulated Gold 57–178 mm²).

We scored the outcome of two types of interactions related to social dominance, aggression and avoidance (Watt, 1986; Chaine et al., 2011). We use these same behaviors to score interactions and social dominance among free-ranging birds at our feeding stations; these behaviors are thus relevant to naturally occurring social interactions in the wild (D. Shizuka, B. E. Lyon & A. S. Chaine, unpublished data). Aggressive behavior was defined as supplanting, chasing or lunging at the second bird. The bird initiating an aggressive interaction always gained access to the food dish or perch when the interaction was near these resources, or it caused the other bird to move when interactions occurred away from the feeder and perch. Actual physical contact never occurred in these trials and no birds showed any signs of injury as a result of the experiment. Avoidance interactions were scored when an individual failed to challenge the other bird for access to food; avoidance typically entailed the bird perching away from the resource but not approaching it, as has been observed in other studies (Watt, 1986; Chaine et al., 2011). In most cases of avoidance interactions, the avoiding bird approached the food or perch only after the dominant individual vacated the resource, as we observe for interactions in the wild (D. Shizuka, B. E. Lyon & A. S. Chaine, unpublished data). During many trials, both aggressive and avoidance behaviors occurred, although aggression usually occurred later in the trial. In each trial we assigned dominance status (dominant or subordinate) based on which bird won the majority of behavioral interactions in the trial (i.e., which bird initiated aggression and was avoided), as in previous work (Chaine et al. 2011). In 10 trials, we were unable to distinguish dominance, owing to either a lack of direct behavioral interactions or a lack of difference in access to food, so these trials were scored as “ties” for analysis. In 32 trials dominance was clear. No bird was used in more than one dominance trial. All methods were approved by the UCSC IACUC (permit PHS Animal Welfare Number A3859-01 to B.L.) who also checked aviaries with birds in them and complied with Federal and California State banding and research permits (banding license 10516 to B.L.).

Statistical Analyses

To determine whether both plumage patches function independently as signals, we first tested whether dominance status would be affected by manipulations of one trait independent of the other. We restricted the data set to the 32 trials for which social dominance could clearly be assigned, and we used

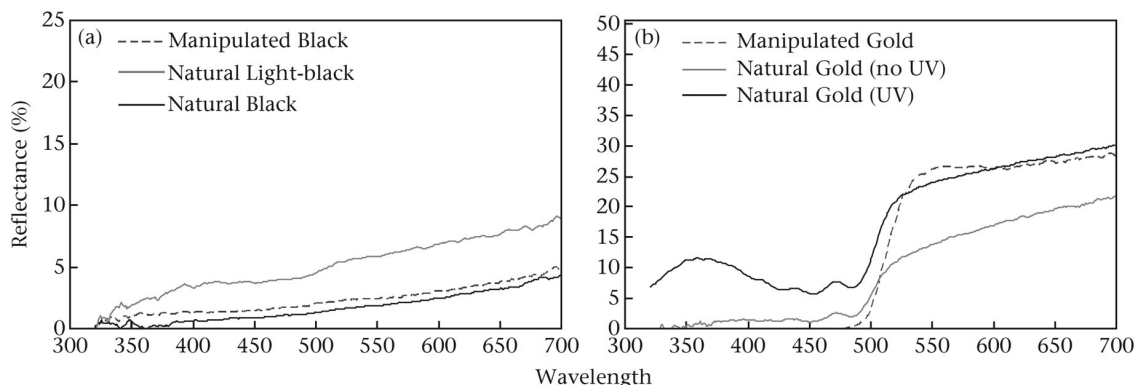


Figure 1. Comparison of manipulated plumage colors and natural crown colors found in the wild. Shown are reflectance curves of individuals that span the extremes of natural colors seen in our local population (solid lines) and the color of the manipulated badges (dashed line) for both (a) black and (b) gold crown areas.

matched-pair tests to control for variation in absolute values of traits among trials.

To determine whether the two signals provide different or complementary information, we assessed whether the proportion of trials that escalated to higher levels of aggression (i.e. showed supplants or lunges rather than simply avoidance behavior) differed according to which crown patch was manipulated or the degree (i.e. size) of the patch manipulation. We included data from the 10 trials for which dominance was not clear so that we could assess when interactions escalated to aggression (total $N = 42$ trials). We then used logistic regression models with multiple predictor variables (described below) to determine which features affected escalation (see also Chaine et al. 2011). We first created a full model with all relevant factors and then compared that model to reduced models that each had one factor removed. A significant change in the predictive ability of the model (deviance) allowed us to determine which factors significantly affected escalation. All tests were conducted in R2.13.0 (R Development Core Team 2009) or GraphPad Software's QuickCalcs applets (<http://graphpad.com/quickcalcs/>) and two-tailed probabilities ≤ 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Results

Multiple Status Signals

In nearly all trials, increasing the size of either the black or the gold crown patch led to a bird being socially dominant. The bird with the experimentally enlarged black patch was dominant in 14 of 15 trials for which dominance was clear (sign test: $N = 15$, $P = 0.001$; Figure 2a). In the gold plumage experiment, the bird with the enlarged gold patch was dominant in 16 of 17 trials for which dominance was clear (sign test: $N = 17$, $P < 0.001$; Figure 2b). Therefore, both black and gold crown features per se directly influenced social dominance during initial encounters between socially unfamiliar pairs of birds, and they did so independently of the other plumage trait.

Differences in Signal Function

While both black and gold crown features function independently as badges of status, they may each affect dominance by different behavioral mechanisms or in somewhat different contexts (Bókony et al., 2006; Chaine and Lyon, 2008b; Chaine et al., 2011) as would be expected if the two signals contained

different information. We asked whether gold and black patch manipulations differed in (1) the likelihood that the manipulated bird became the dominant or (2) the likelihood that the encounter escalated to higher levels of aggression as was the case in our previous work (Chaine et al. 2011).

Among trials that showed clear dominance, there was no difference in the proportion of trials in which the manipulated individual won the encounter between black (14/15) and gold trials (16/17; Fisher's exact test: $P = 1.0$). There was also no significant difference in the proportion of trials that escalated (aggression versus tolerance + avoidance) between black (11/20) and gold manipulations (8/22; Fisher's exact test: $P = 0.35$).

We also examined whether degree of trial escalation (no escalation beyond avoidance versus escalating to aggression) was related to the relative difference in crown features after manipulation of crown sizes. We constructed general linear models to examine the relationship between trial escalation (binomial, logit link) and three measures of crown features that could influence dominance interactions based on the receiver's (i.e. sham bird since the manipulated bird is not aware of the manipulation) perception of plumage signals. (1) We compared the difference in postmanipulation patch sizes between the manipulated and sham birds since relative crown size influences dominance in contests between unmanipulated birds (Chaine et al. 2011). (2) We measured the difference in patch sizes of the trait that was not augmented (i.e. gold patch in "black trials" and black patch in "gold trials") between the experimental and sham individuals. Since the trait that was eventually augmented was matched in our experiments, the difference in the other trait could affect dominance interactions. (3) We asked whether escalation might increase if the receiver perceives an inconsistency in the two plumage traits (Rohwer, 1977; Rohwer and Rohwer, 1978; Järvi et al., 1987) of the manipulated bird since these traits are weakly correlated in the wild ($r = 0.23$ in Table 1 of Chaine et al. 2011). Thus we measured the mismatch in size of the gold and black crowns of the manipulated bird (manipulated-unmanipulated crown patch sizes of the experimental individual) as a measure of inconsistency in information.

In gold plumage manipulation trials ($N = 15$), higher levels of escalation were associated with a larger contrast between the postmanipulation crown sizes of the experimental and sham individuals (log-likelihood = -11.59 , $P < 0.001$; Figure 3a). Higher levels of escalation were also associated with a smaller mismatch in sizes of the manipulated and unmanipulated patches of the experimental individual (log-likelihood = -12.15 ,

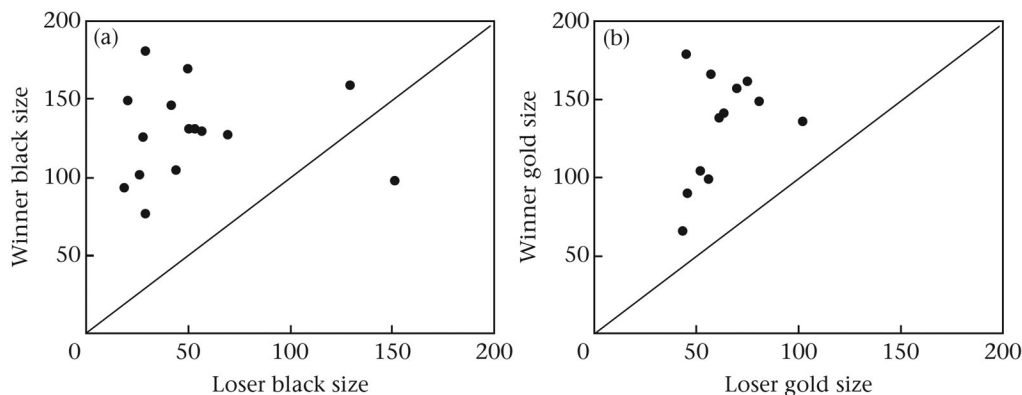


Figure 2. Comparisons of postmanipulation patch size between winners and losers of a trial. If points lie above the diagonal of equal crown size, then the individual with the larger crown size (i.e. manipulated bird in this case since premanipulation sizes were very similar) was dominant in the interaction. (a) Black patch manipulation trials. (b) Gold patch manipulation trials. Trials are included only if dominance was clear. For each manipulation, there was one trial in which the sham individual was dominant, although only the black trial had postmanipulation crown size data available for this interaction (the one point below the diagonal) whereas the gold trial in which the sham was dominant was missing postmanipulation crown size (photo too blurry).

$P < 0.001$; Figure 3b). Escalation was unrelated to the difference in sizes of the unmanipulated patches of the experimental and sham individuals (log-likelihood = -0.71 , $P = 0.40$).

In black patch manipulations ($N = 19$), we did not find any significant relationships between crown features and the probability that aggression escalated in a trial. The probability of escalation was not associated with a difference in crown sizes between the manipulated and sham individuals in either the manipulated patch (log-likelihood = -0.10 , $P = 0.76$) or unmanipulated patch (log-likelihood = -1.40 , $P = 0.24$) nor was it associated with the mismatch in size between the manipulated and unmanipulated patches of the experimental individual (log-likelihood = -2.67 , $P = 0.10$).

Discussion

While a number of correlative studies suggest that multiple badges of status are used to determine dominance in nonbreeding birds (Balph et al., 1979; Bókony et al., 2006; Chaine et al., 2011), we provide here the first experimental confirmation that multiple badges directly and independently affect social dominance. We found that experimentally increasing the size of either the black or the gold patch was sufficient to establish dominance among unfamiliar individuals with similar-sized natural crowns. Two implications of this experiment are critical. First, the experiment confirms that the plumage patches per se act as badges of status and determine the outcome of a contest. Second, by experimentally decoupling the two traits, we showed that each trait is linked to social dominance independently of body size and the other patch. This result confirms our previous correlational findings that both traits serve as badges of status and provides unequivocal evidence for multiple badges of status in a nonbreeding bird.

We did not find a difference between the two color patch manipulations in the frequency of trials in which the manipulated bird won the contest nor in the frequency with which a contest escalated to higher levels of aggression. The overall lack of differences between the two manipulations may not be surprising since the manipulation greatly altered patch size (see Methods) and could have overwhelmed any more subtle differences in badge function of the two patches. This pattern and the experimental design we used prevent us from distinguishing between alternative hypotheses for the evolution and function of multiple signals (reviewed in Marchetti, 1998 and Candolin, 2003).

In line with our previous study (Chaine et al. 2011), we found that the difference in gold, but not black, patch size between individuals was linked to the probability that a trial escalated in aggression over food. However, the way in which the manipulated gold patch influenced escalation was different from our previous study. When the plumage patches are not manipulated, individuals that are closely matched in gold patch sizes are more likely to interact aggressively (Chaine et al. 2011). In this study, we found the opposite pattern: when the gold plumage patch was manipulated, larger differences between the manipulated (larger patch) and sham (natural patch size) individuals increased the probability of aggression (Figure 3a). Our results suggest that gold plumage has an important role in determining the type of interaction the birds engage in, but that role is more complex than we might have predicted.

There are at least two ways to reconcile the differences in the role of gold plumage in generating escalation between the correlative and experimental studies. One possible explanation for the difference between the effects of gold plumage in the observational study (smaller difference between manipulated and sham individual leads to more aggression) and the current experimental study (larger difference leads to more aggression; Figure 3a) is that the increased aggression relates to behavioral signals exchanged between the signaler and receiver. For ex-

ample, if the receiver (sham bird) displays more submissive behavior in response to the signaler's (manipulated bird) enlarged plumage patch than the signaler typically experiences, the signaler may respond with increasing aggression. Such a dynamic would only occur in experimental manipulations, because the signaler does not have direct access to information about its current signal size and responds aggressively to unexpectedly submissive behavior displayed by the receiver.

A second possible explanation for the observed increase in aggression with an increasing difference in gold patch size in the present study (Figure 3a) is provided by the "incongruence hypothesis" (Rohwer, 1977; Rohwer and Rohwer, 1978; Järvi et al., 1987). Under this hypothesis, experimentally altering a badge creates a mismatch between the manipulated patch and behavior (Järvi et al. 1987) of the experimental bird which leads to conflicting signals about their dominance status. As a result, the receiver may increase aggression towards the signaler to "test" its dominance status and enforce signal honesty by social means (Rohwer, 1975, 1982; Tibbetts and Dale, 2004). The results of our experimental manipulation are consistent with both of the above hypotheses. The identity of the individuals that instigated escalated interactions, which we did not record, would be necessary to distinguish between these alternatives.

In theory, we can apply the same logic that underlies the incongruence hypothesis to a multiple-signaling context that does not include behavior. If multiple signals show some correlation (e.g. Chaine et al. 2011) and only one of the signals is manipulated, the resulting mismatch in traits could result in increased aggression. In other words, a trait manipulation could generate an extreme combination of phenotypic traits and such individuals might experience more testing in general. Our results were not consistent with the prediction that mismatches in multiple signals lead to increased testing. Instead, we found that a larger mismatch in the sizes of the gold manipulated and black unmanipulated patches of the experimental bird led to lower levels of escalation in gold manipulations (Figure 3b). Likewise, the mismatch between the black manipulated and gold unmanipulated patches of the experimental bird were unrelated to escalation in black manipulations. One possible reason that we did not find increased escalation could be that our manipulations may not have produced sufficiently unusual or extreme phenotypes, counter to the assumptions of the multiple signal mismatch hypothesis. Future tests should employ manipulations that produce unusual combinations of traits. Alternatively, it is possible that the enlarged patches produced an unusual combination of patch sizes, but that the assumption that mismatches lead to testing is incorrect for golden-crowned sparrows. Despite this, we believe that the logic of the multiple-signaling mismatch hypothesis for maintaining signal honesty is sound and should be tested in other systems.

A few other systems have found multiple badges of status and comparisons among these studies provide insights into the contexts in which we might be more likely to find multiple status signals. For example, evidence for multiple status signals comes from both breeding (male-male competition; Ligon et al., 1990; Mateos and Carranza, 1997; Pryke et al., 2001, 2002; Pryke and Andersson, 2003; Chaine and Lyon, 2008b) and nonbreeding (Balph et al., 1979; Järvi and Bakken, 1984; Bókony et al., 2006; Chaine et al., 2011) contexts, which suggests that multiple status signals are not restricted to one part of the life cycle. A subset of these studies sought to identify how multiple status signals might differ in function. In house sparrows, one signal (bib) appears to be linked to aggression, whereas the other (wing bars) is associated with the ability to defend against an intrusion (Bókony et al. 2006). In great tits, *Parus major*, one signal (breast stripe; Järvi and Bakken, 1984; Maynard Smith and Harper, 1988) appears to provide longer term information on dominance whereas the other (missing cheek

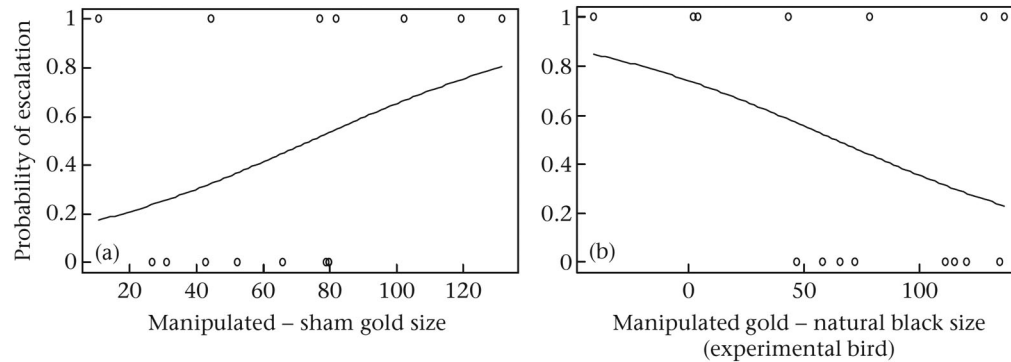


Figure 3. The probability that a trial escalated from low aggression (avoidance) to higher aggression (supplant) in relation to the relative size of color patches postmanipulation for gold manipulation trials. (a) Escalation in relation to the difference in gold patch size between the manipulated and sham individuals. (b) Escalation in relation to the difference in size of the two color patches of the manipulated individual.

patch feathers; Galván and Sanz, 2008, 2009) conveys more recent dominance history. Finally, in lark buntings, *Calamospiza melanocorys* (Chaine & Lyon 2008b) and golden-crowned sparrows (Chaine et al. 2011) one signal seems to function primarily at a distance prior to overt aggression whereas the other is important in escalated encounters. From these examples, it is clear that a seemingly simple competitive interaction for food (or mates) may actually entail multiple, subtle levels of interactions. If this is the case, a number of badges might be important to fine-tune the assessment of social status in natural populations.

Despite the dearth of studies investigating multiple signals in the nonbreeding season, we suggest that there are several contexts in which such multiple signals would be favored by selection. For example, multiple “redundant” signals could evolve as psychological “amplifiers” (Rowe, 1999, 2013; Rowe and Skelhorn, 2004) or as a means to prevent cheating. Deception (Dawkins & Guilford 1991) that requires “cheating” in a number of signals could be much more difficult or costly than manipulation of just one trait: a notion not yet investigated in empirical studies of multiple signals. In turn, complexity in social dynamics could lead to the evolution of “multiple messages,” as suggested in some of the empirical examples given above (Bókony et al., 2006; Chaine et al., 2011). One possibility not yet investigated is that some signals may target familiar individuals while others target strangers (but see Tibbetts and Dale, 2004; Sheehan and Tibbetts, 2011). Likewise, dominance interactions in different contexts (e.g. over food piles versus over central roosting positions) may entail different forms of conflict and thus require different types of social signals. Specific attention to signaling contexts in the wild and the intended receivers will be important for understanding the social factors that favor multiple badges of status.

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