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# 1 **How do ecological and social environments reflect parental roles in birds?**

## 2 **A comparative analysis**

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23 **Abstract**

24 Parental roles are highly diverse in animal taxa. Since caring is an important determinant of fitness,  
25 understanding the origin and maintenance of various parental care strategies is a key question in  
26 evolutionary biology. Here we investigate parental care patterns in birds, which exhibit a remarkable  
27 diversity of parental sex roles. By means of phylogenetically informed comparative analyses we  
28 investigate whether and how care provisioning is predicted by ecology and social environment. Making  
29 use of the most comprehensive dataset including 1101 species that represent 126 avian families, we  
30 show that sex differences in parental care are neither related to food type nor to nest type, two key  
31 ecological factors. However, we found an effect of the social environment, as males tend to care  
32 relatively more in colonial species than in non-colonial species. Taken together, these results  
33 highlight the importance of social effects for evolution of diverse parental sex roles.

34

35 **Key words**

36 food type, nest type, coloniality, parental roles, social behavior

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## 40 INTRODUCTION

41 Parental care, which increases offspring survival at the cost of parents' viability and fecundity, varies  
42 widely among animal taxa (Balshine 2012; Trumbo 2012). Birds are characterized by an extraordinary  
43 diversity in parental roles, ranging from female-only care (e.g., hummingbirds, where only the females  
44 build nests, incubate eggs and feed the young), to biparental care (e.g., woodpeckers, where the two  
45 sexes share parental duties), and male-only care (e.g., some shorebirds, where the males incubate the  
46 eggs and rear the young without any support by the females) (Cockburn 2006; Remeš et al. 2015).  
47 Understanding this diversity is important as parental roles have repercussions on many other  
48 characteristics, such as sex differences in morphology, demography and mating strategies (Emlen and  
49 Oring 1977; Fairbairn et al. 2007; Royle et al. 2012; Klug 2018).

50 Various ecological and social variables have been proposed to influence parental sex roles (McGraw et  
51 al. 2010; Klug et al. 2012). Firstly, it has been proposed that food type is related to sex differences in  
52 parental care. It has been argued that uniparental care is to be expected in bird species feeding on  
53 plant materials such as fruits and nectar; as such food sources tend to be seasonally abundant, one  
54 parent should suffice to efficiently provision the young (Cockburn 2006; Barve and La Sorte 2016). In  
55 contrast, biparental care might be expected in bird species feeding on insects or other animals; such  
56 food is often dispersed and difficult to catch and both parents are required to satisfy the demands of  
57 their offspring (Badyaev and Ghalambor 1998). However, this line of argumentation is not fully  
58 convincing. Since plant food is nutritionally inferior to animal food, herbivorous chicks may need much  
59 larger amounts of food to match their energetic demands; accordingly, both parents might be required  
60 to collect or defend enough food. Conversely, a single parent might be sufficient to satisfy the demands  
61 of carnivorous offspring if only few highly nutritious food items need to be collected per time unit.

62 Secondly, it has been proposed that nest type (open or closed) is an important determinant of parental  
63 sex roles (Collias and Collias 1984; Hansell 2000). Open nests are exposed to the environment and  
64 consequently face a high risk of predation (Collias 1964; Cody 1966; Martin 1995; Lima 2009). It has  
65 been argued that this will select for biparental care, since the predation risk can be reduced  
66 considerably if both parents are around (Montgomerie and Weatherhead 1988; Kleindorfer and Hoi  
67 1997; Martin and Briskie 2009). In contrast, uniparental care might be expected to be common in  
68 species with closed nests, which provide a good protection from predators. However, an argument  
69 could also be made for the opposite pattern. For example, the presence of both parents (and, in  
70 particular, the presence of a brightly coloured father) could make an open nest more conspicuous to  
71 predators; hence predation risk might be enhanced rather than reduced if both parents are around  
72 (Skutch 1949; Martin et al. 2000). Predation pressure is generally lower in species with closed nests,  
73 but such species tend to have greater clutch sizes than those building open nests (Jetz et al. 2008).

74 Accordingly, just in cavity breeders both parents may be needed to meet the energetic demands of  
75 the offspring.

76 Thirdly, social environment is also predicted to affect parental care strategies. In colonial breeding  
77 species, pairs live in groups and often in high density, which reduces the risk of predation and allows  
78 for exchanging information about food resources (Alexander 1974; Perrins and Birkhead 1983; Krause  
79 and Ruxton 2002; Evans et al. 2016). Accordingly, one might expect that uniparental care is more  
80 prevalent in colonially breeding species than in solitarily breeding species. In addition, opportunities  
81 for extra-pair copulations are typically high in colonial species as breeding density is high, lowering the  
82 certainty of paternity (Westneat and Sherman, 1997; Mayer and Pasinelli 2013) and selecting for  
83 reduced paternal care. But again, a case could also be made for a different prediction. Colonially  
84 breeding species almost invariable face high intraspecific competition (interference competition and  
85 competition for food and other resources, Perrins and Birkhead 1983; Krause and Ruxton 2002). Based  
86 on this, one would expect biparental care, as both parents are needed to successfully raise the young.

87 In view of all this, it is not self-evident which parental care patterns are to be expected under different  
88 ecological and social scenarios. It is therefore important to investigate what the data say. To what  
89 extent and in what way do ecological conditions (like food quality or predation pressure) or the social  
90 environment (like coloniality) reflect parental roles? To answer this question, we here apply  
91 phylogenetic comparative analyses to a comprehensive dataset including 1101 avian species (26 orders  
92 and 119 families). First, we examine whether parental roles are associated with food type. Specifically,  
93 we investigate whether plant-eating species exhibit uniparental or sex-biased parental care while  
94 carnivorous species exhibit more biparental care. Second, we explore whether parental care is  
95 associated with nest type, where nest type is viewed as a proxy for the risk of predation. Specifically,  
96 we test whether open nesters or closed nesters are more likely to provide biparental care. Third, we  
97 study whether parental care patterns are associated with coloniality. Specifically, we test whether  
98 colonial breeders tend to exhibit female-biased care while parental sex roles are less biased in solitarily  
99 breeding bird species.

100

## 101 **METHODS**

### 102 **Data collection**

103 We collected data from reference works (e.g., The Birds of the Western Palearctic, The Birds of North  
104 America, Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds), preexisting datasets (see below)

105 and primary literatures by using Web of Science and Google Scholar. We added more species with  
106 available data on parental behavior to an existing dataset used by Liker et al. (2015). Then we  
107 augmented the dataset with expanded information on parental roles by extracting ecological and  
108 social traits (food type, nest type and coloniality). The final dataset included 1101 species (26 orders  
109 and 119 families) representing a broad spectrum of avian taxa. All data are available in the  
110 supplementary materials.

### 111 **Parental care variables**

112 Bird species exhibit diverse forms of parental care, ranging from the preparation of the nest to  
113 nutrition provision. Here, we investigate eight types of avian parental behavior: nest building, nest  
114 guarding, incubation, chick brooding, chick feeding, chick guarding, post-fledgling feeding and post-  
115 fledgling guarding. Since quantitative data on parental contribution were not available for many  
116 species, we scored each care type on a 5-point scale: -1: no male care; -0.5: 1–33% male care; 0: 34–  
117 66% male care; 0.5: 67–99% male care; 1: 100% male care. When quantitative data were not measured,  
118 we used the information from verbal descriptions. For instance, species with more male contribution  
119 to nestling feeding would be scored 0.5 on chick feeding. By means of the scoring system, the estimates  
120 of paternal contribution and maternal contribution were fully dependent, that is, male scores would  
121 always be the additive inverse of female scores. Therefore, the scores directly reflected the sex  
122 differences in parental roles. 0 indicated approximately equal parental investment by both parents,  
123 0.5 and -0.5 represented male-biased and female-biased parental contribution, respectively, 1 and -1  
124 suggested male-only care and female-only care, respectively.

125 We then divided parental activities into two breeding phases: (i) pre-hatching care, which involved  
126 nest building, nest guarding and incubation and (ii) post-hatching care, which included chick brooding,  
127 chick feeding, chick guarding, post-fledgling feeding and post-fledgling guarding. To score the relative  
128 participation in pre-hatching care and post-hatching care by males, we calculated the mean scores of  
129 different components of parental behavior for each state. The relative participation in pre-hatching  
130 care by males strongly correlated with the relative participation in nest building, incubation and nest  
131 guarding by males ( $r^2 = 0.508-0.644$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , see details in Supplementary Figure S1 and Table S1).  
132 Similarly, the relative participation in post-hatching care by males was significantly related to the  
133 relative participation in chick brooding, chick feeding, chick guarding, post-fledgling feeding and post-  
134 fledgling guarding by males ( $r^2 = 0.393-0.729$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , see details in Supplementary Figure S1 and  
135 Table S1). This suggested that pre- and post-hatching care can reliably represent a set of specific care  
136 components.

137 **Ecological and social variables**

138 The diet of bird species was classified into two categories: (i) plant materials which included fruit, seed,  
139 leaves and (ii) animals which included invertebrates and vertebrates. For omnivorous species, their  
140 mainly eaten food category was allocated. Since parents and nestlings subsist on different food items  
141 in some species (e.g., In willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) the adults forage for plant materials all  
142 year round while their nestlings are usually fed on insects (Peters 1958)), we collected diet of parents  
143 and nestlings separately.

144 Nest type was treated as binary variables (open or closed). Open nests, which are exposed to adverse  
145 weather conditions and predators, included scrapes (e.g., nests of many shorebirds), cups (e.g., nests  
146 of many passerines) and platforms (e.g., nests of raptors) (Hansell 2000). Closed nests are completely  
147 covered by the walls or pliable materials, that is, they can only be accessed by the small entrance. For  
148 instance, cavities (e.g., nests of woodpeckers), burrows (e.g., nests of many seabirds), domes and  
149 globes (e.g., nests of weavers) are all enclosed structures (Hansell 2000). We only extracted data on  
150 nest type from studies of natural nests (i.e., nest-box studies were excluded).

151 Coloniality was categorized into (i) solitary breeding, breeders never live in groups, (ii) semi-colonial  
152 breeding, breeders are either solitary or colonial, and (iii) colonial breeding, individuals always breed  
153 in groups and they defend a territory which only consists of the nest sites (Perrins and Birkhead, 1983,  
154 Van Turnhout et al. 2010). We only extracted data on coloniality from studies of natural nests, since  
155 the studies of nest-box artificially changed the spatial distribution of nests.

156 **Phylogenetic analyses**

157 To test whether pre-hatching care differs from post-hatching care, we conducted phylogenetic paired  
158 t-tests (Lindenfors et al. 2010). We first estimated the corresponding phylogenetic mean value of pre-  
159 hatching and post-hatching care of each species, then compared whether the mean difference was  
160 different from zero (Lindenfors et al. 2010). The analyses were implemented in R (3.4.2) using the  
161 'phytools' package (Revell 2012).

162 We analyzed the correlation between parental care variables and predictor variables by using  
163 phylogenetic generalized least squares (PGLS) (Freckleton et al. 2002). This technique controls for the  
164 dependence of species traits as a result of shared evolutionary history by estimating the expected  
165 covariance structure, then modified slope and intercept estimates would be calculated. In all analyses,  
166 Pagel's  $\lambda$  which varies between 0 and 1 was estimated to represent the phylogenetic signal (Freckleton

167 et al. 2002). A trait with strong phylogenetic signal is more similar among closely related species, while  
168 data points are more independent if phylogenetic signal is weak.

169 Considering the uncertainty of phylogenetic estimation caused by the absence of empirical support on  
170 the prediction of evolutionary relationships among species (Jetz et al. 2012), we randomly extracted  
171 100 phylogenetic trees from the most comprehensive avian phylogenies (Jetz et al. 2012). Each PGLS  
172 model was analyzed across all of the trees and the mean value of resulting 100 parameter estimates  
173 were calculated.

174 For each dependent variable (i.e., the relative participation in pre-hatching care by males, the relative  
175 participation in post-hatching care by males), we established separate PGLS models to investigate the  
176 effect of each ecological and social traits. Here, we present (1) the results of bivariate models which  
177 only included one of the main predictors, and (2) the results of multi-predictor models. Since nestling  
178 diet was related to parental diet, two multi-predictor PGLS models were built in order to avoid the  
179 problem of multicollinearity. These two multi-predictor models contained the following predictors i)  
180 parental diet, nest type and coloniality; ii) nestling diet, nest type and coloniality. Moreover, two crucial  
181 life-history traits were included in all multi-predictor models: body mass (log-transformed) and chick  
182 development mode (precocial vs. altricial). This is due to the fact that body mass strongly correlated  
183 with several life-history traits (e.g., longevity, Lindstedt and Calder 1976), and chick development was  
184 suggested to affect parental roles (Thomas and Székely 2005; Olson et al. 2008). All PGLS analyses were  
185 carried out in the R statistical computing environment as well, using the package “caper” (Orme 2013).

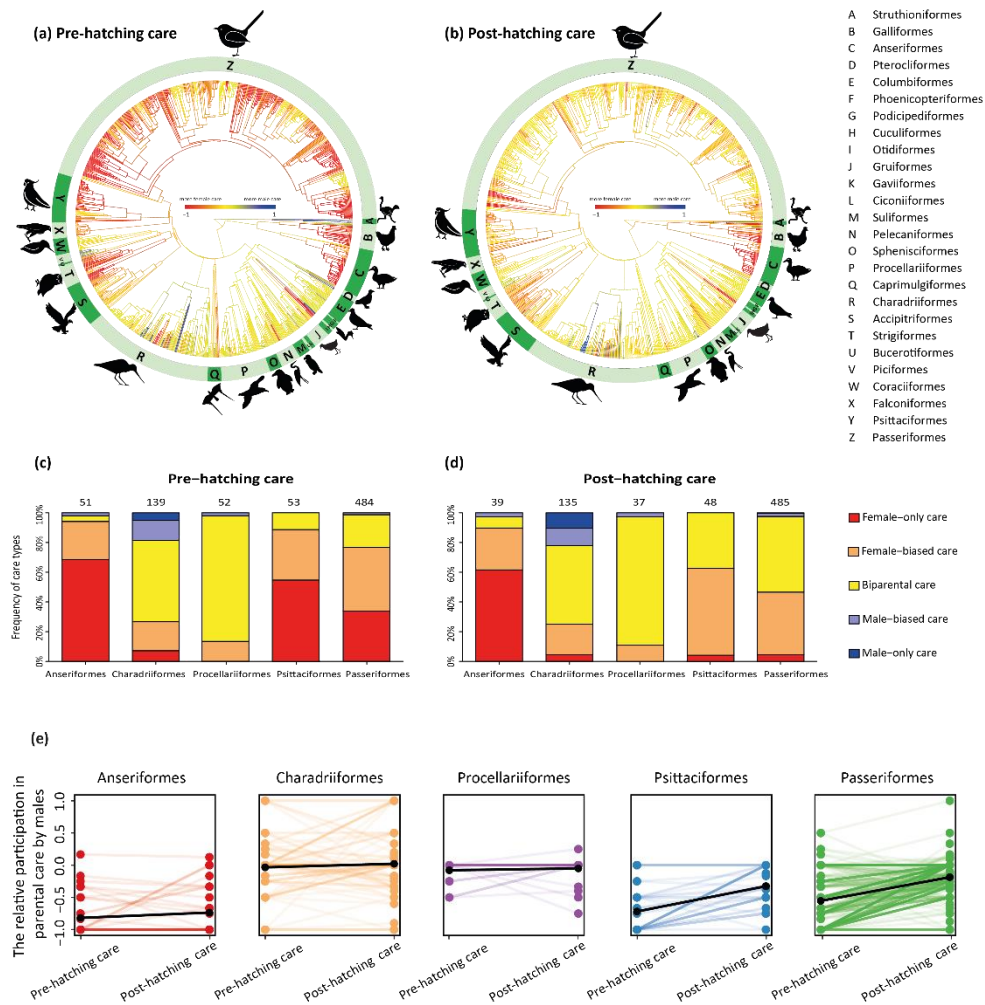
186

## 187 **RESULTS**

### 188 **Pre-hatching care vs. post-hatching care**

189 Birds exhibit diverse parental roles, consistently with expectations, including female-only care,  
190 biparental care and male-only care (Figure 1). Even in the same clade, different parental care patterns  
191 can be observed (Figure 1a-d), corresponding to the intermediate phylogenetic signal of each breeding  
192 activities ( $\lambda = 0.187-0.755$ , see statistical estimates in Supplementary Table S1). For instance,  
193 uniparental care by the male or the female, and biparental care coexist in Anseriformes,  
194 Charadriiformes, Procellariiformes, Psittaciformes and Passeriformes. A remarkable diversity is  
195 observed in shorebirds in that all care types (female-only care, female-biased care, biparental care,  
196 male-biased care and male-only care) can be found (Figure 1c, d).





**Figure 1. Distribution of parental roles in birds.** (a, b) Phylogenetic distribution of pre-hatching care and post-hatching care (maximum clade credibility tree of 100 phylogenies using 1065 and 991 bird species, respectively). The figure shows the relative participation in parental care by males for each bird species. (Red = female-only care, yellow = biparental care, blue = male-only care, other colors = sex-biased care). (c, d) Frequencies of different parental care patterns in two breeding phases in five major clades. Care patterns are classified into 5 categories: female-only care: 0% male care (red); female-biased care: 1–33% male care (orange); biparental care 34–66% male care (yellow); male-biased care: 67–99% male care (purple); male-only care: 100% male care (blue). Sample size is shown at the top of each column. (e) Differences in parental roles between pre-hatching and post-hatching phases in five large clades of birds. Relative male pre-hatching care and post-hatching care are represented by scatterplots, the lines connect two breeding phases for each species and overplotted lines appear as darker lines. The means of pre-hatching care and post-hatching care of each avian family are plotted in black.

198 Female-only care is more common in the pre-hatching phase (26.67% of 1065 species) than in the post-  
 199 hatching phase (7.87% of 991 species), while biparental care is more prevalent during post-hatching  
 200 (50.66%) than during pre-hatching (33.43%). In contrast, male-only care is rare in both breeding phases  
 201 (1.03% and 2.02% in the pre- and post-hatching phase, respectively) (Figure 1). This suggests biparental  
 202 care is predominant in both the pre-hatching and post-hatching phases, and the parental care offered  
 203 by the male does not differ from by the female in both breeding phases (PGLS fitted an intercept only  
 204 (with 100 phylogenies), pre-hatching care:  $Slope \pm SE = -0.080 \pm 0.188$ ,  $P = 0.649$ ,  $n = 1065$  species;  
 205 post-hatching care:  $Slope \pm SE = -0.187 \pm 0.134$   $P = 0.170$ ,  $n = 991$  species). Furthermore, the relative  
 206 participation in parental care by males is not different between pre-hatching phase and post-hatching  
 207 phase (Figure 1 and Table 1). We only found that the relative contribution to post-hatching care by  
 208 males is marginally larger than in pre-hatching care by males in parrots (Psittaciformes, Figure 1e and  
 209 Table 1).  
 210

**Table 1. Phylogenetic mean for the parental care differs between pre-hatching phase and post-hatching phase.** The difference between the relative participation in pre- and post-hatching care by males is compared in all species and five large clades (Anseriformes, Charadriiformes, Procellariiformes, Psittaciformes and Passeriformes,). Estimates are phylogenetic mean difference with standard error (*Mean difference  $\pm$  SE*), the corresponding *t* and *p*-values of 100 phylogenetic paired t-test repeated with different phylogenies. log-likelihood of the fitted model *log(L)*, phylogenetic signal  $\lambda$  and the number of species *n* are also given for each model.

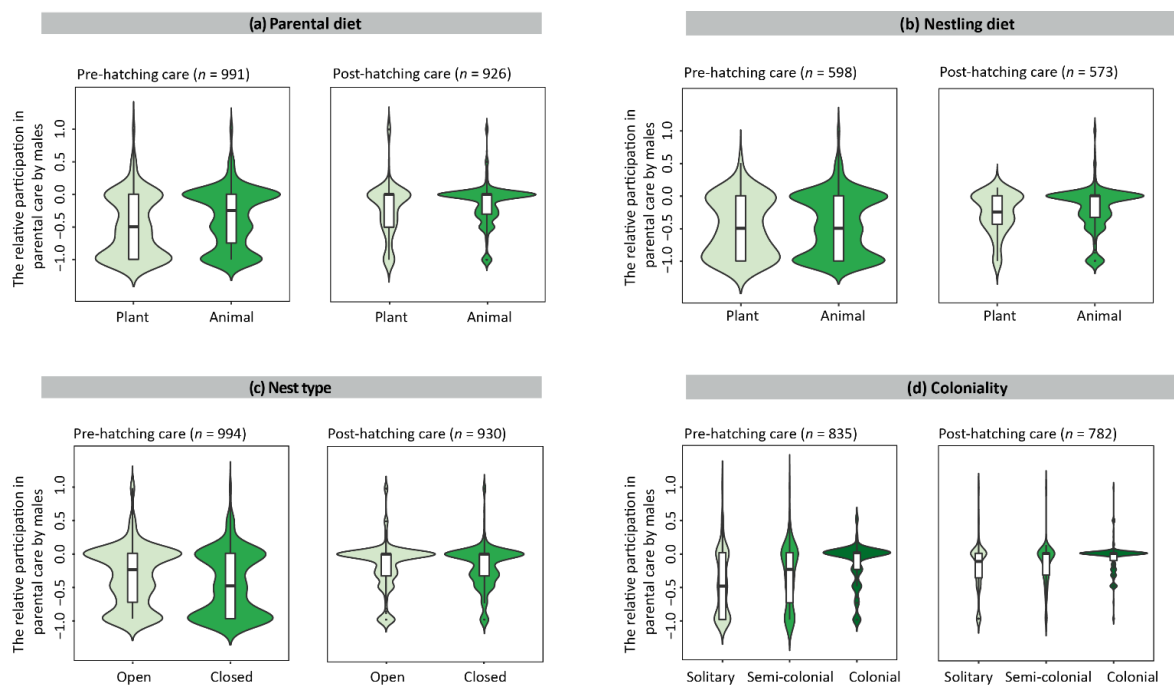
Phylogenetic paired t-test	Mean difference $\pm$ SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Log(L)	$\lambda$	<i>n</i>
All species	0.052 $\pm$ 0.184	0.340	0.735	-401.4	0.626	955
Anseriformes	-0.080 $\pm$ 0.063	-1.405	0.181	-14.08	0.019	38
Charadriiformes	-0.024 $\pm$ 0.111	-0.221	0.826	-77.62	0.334	130
Procellariiformes	-0.084 $\pm$ 0.117	-0.798	0.437	0.198	0.502	35
Psittaciformes	<b>-0.299 <math>\pm</math> 0.170</b>	<b>-1.921</b>	<b>0.079</b>	<b>-19.16</b>	<b>0.520</b>	<b>48</b>
Passeriformes	-0.257 $\pm$ 0.187	-1.684	0.102	-154.5	0.667	459

**Table 2. Pre- and post-hatching care in relation to ecology and social environment in birds using phylogenetically generalized linear squares models (PGLS).** In both bivariate and multi-predictor PGLS models, the relative participation in pre-hatching care and post-hatching care by males are the response variables, respectively. Predictors include parental diet (plant vs. animal food), nesting diet (plant vs. animal food), nest type (open vs. closed), coloniality (solitary, semi-colonial, colonial). Development mode (precocial vs. altricial) and body mass (log-transformed) are included in the full multi-predictor models. Estimates are means of regression coefficients with standard error (*Slope ± SE*), the corresponding *t* and *p*-values of 100 PGLS analyses repeated with different phylogenies, significant results are highlighted in bold. Sample size *n*, R-squared *r*<sup>2</sup> and phylogenetic signal *λ* are also given for each model.

(a) Bivariate models												
Predictors	Relative participation in pre-hatching care by males						Relative participation in post-hatching care by males					
	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>
Parental diet	0.032 ± 0.042	0.752	0.460	0.001	0.826	991	-0.015 ± 0.036	-0.417	0.679	<0.001	0.643	926
Nestling diet	-0.048 ± 0.058	-0.828	0.421	0.001	0.847	598	-0.035 ± 0.049	-0.707	0.484	0.001	0.624	573
Nest type	-0.026 ± 0.040	-0.656	0.518	<0.001	0.841	994	0.011 ± 0.036	0.313	0.756	<0.001	0.666	930
Coloniality	0.021 ± 0.017	1.248	0.217	0.002	0.843	835	<b>0.032 ± 0.016</b>	<b>1.927</b>	<b>0.055</b>	<b>0.005</b>	<b>0.551</b>	<b>782</b>
(b) Full model												
Predictors	Relative participation in pre-hatching care by males						Relative participation in post-hatching care by males					
	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>
Parental diet	0.098 ± 0.055	1.791	0.079	0.011	0.853	637	0.029 ± 0.044	0.665	0.508	0.014	0.408	602
Nest type	-0.024 ± 0.048	-0.497	0.621	-	-	-	0.001 ± 0.039	0.028	0.942	-	-	-
Coloniality	0.022 ± 0.019	1.186	0.240	-	-	-	<b>0.044 ± 0.181</b>	<b>2.448</b>	<b>0.015</b>	-	-	-
Body mass	-0.008 ± 0.017	-0.487	0.630	-	-	-	-0.012 ± 0.014	-0.880	0.381	-	-	-
Development	-0.055 ± 0.049	-1.133	0.263	-	-	-	-0.036 ± 0.415	-0.877	0.385	-	-	-
(c) Full model												
Predictors	Relative participation in pre-hatching care by males						Relative participation in post-hatching care by males					
	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Slope ± SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>λ</i>	<i>n</i>
Juvenile diet	0.092 ± 0.073	1.264	0.214	0.031	0.882	438	0.070 ± 0.061	1.142	0.256	0.046	0.542	420
Nest type	-0.024 ± 0.050	0.482	0.632	-	-	-	0.007 ± 0.042	0.155	0.876	-	-	-
Coloniality	<b>0.068 ± 0.022</b>	<b>3.105</b>	<b>0.002</b>	-	-	-	<b>0.068 ± 0.021</b>	<b>3.232</b>	<b>0.001</b>	-	-	-
Body mass	-0.024 ± 0.203	-1.208	0.232	-	-	-	-0.020 ± 0.017	-1.197	0.234	-	-	-
Development	-0.061 ± 0.059	-1.033	0.304	-	-	-	<b>-0.125 ± 0.051</b>	<b>-2.428</b>	<b>0.016</b>	-	-	-

## 212 Diet

213 Food type is not associated with parental roles: neither parental diet nor nestling diet is associated  
 214 with sex differences in parental roles (Table 2). In the pre-hatching phase, females provide more care  
 215 than males no matter what types of food they forage for. While the approximate identical care level is  
 216 provided by the male and the female in both herbivorous and carnivorous bird species during the post-  
 217 hatching phase (Figure 2a,b). The lack of relationship between food type and sex-specific parental roles  
 218 is consistent between the bivariate (Table 2a) and multi-predictor models in which the effects of all  
 219 potential variables are included (Table 2b,c).



**Figure 2. The association between parental roles and ecological and social environment.** (a) Parental diet, (b) nestling diet, (c) nest type and (d) coloniality are plotted against relative male pre-hatching care and relative male post-hatching care, respectively. The rectangle of small box plot in each violin plot shows the ends of the first and third quartiles and a vertical line indicates the median value of male care relative to female care. The kernel density plot of each violin plot shows the distribution of parental care and its probability density. The participation in parental care by males was scored on a 5-point scale, -1: 0% male care; -0.5: 1–33% male care; 0: 34–66% male care; 0.5: 67–99% male care; 1: 100% male care. Parental diet and nestling diet were scored on a 2-point scale, 0: plant food, 1: animal food. Nest type was scored on a 2-point scale, 0: open nest, 1: closed nest. Coloniality was scored on a 3-point scale, 0: solitary, 1: semi-colonial, 2: colonial. The number of species *n* is shown for each plot.

## 220 **Nest type**

221 Nest type does not predict parental sex roles, as the relative participation in parental care by males is  
222 not significantly different between open and closed nests either in bivariate (Table 2a) or multiple  
223 regression analyses (where parental diet and nestling diet are controlled for separately) (Table 2b,c):  
224 female-biased pre-hatching care is associated with both open and closed nests, and more egalitarian  
225 biparental post-hatching care is found in both nest types (Figure 2c), corresponding to the general care  
226 pattern where female-biased care predominates in the pre-hatching phase while biparental care  
227 predominates in the post-hatching phase (Figure 1).

## 228 **Coloniality**

229 Coloniality is associated with sex differences in parental care. First, coloniality predicts post-hatching  
230 care: the relative participation in post-hatching care by males increases as coloniality increases (Table  
231 2, Figure 2d). The relationship is marginally nonsignificant in the bivariate model (Table 2a), and is  
232 significant in the full multi-predictor models where parental diet and nestling diet are controlled for  
233 respectively (Table 2b,c). However, these fitted PGLS models account for a modest variability of post-  
234 hatching care ( $r^2 = 4.6\%$ ). Second, relative male pre-hatching care is not related to coloniality (Table 2),  
235 although we found a significant trend in the multi-predictor model in which nestling diet instead of  
236 parental diet is statistically controlled for (Table 2c).

237

## 238 **DISCUSSION**

239 Our comprehensive phylogenetic comparative analyses confirm that parental roles are highly diverse  
240 among avian species, and biparental care is the prevailing care pattern in both pre- and post-hatching  
241 phases (Cockburn 2006). Moreover, female-only care is relatively common in the pre-hatching phase,  
242 in line with the fact that in approximately 30% of passerine birds only females incubate the eggs (White  
243 and Kinney 1974). In addition, the relative participation in parental care by each sex is not remarkably  
244 differ between the pre- and post-hatching phases, indicating brood desertion after hatching by either  
245 sex happens rarely, but in some precocial bird species such as shorebirds (see Clutton-Brock 1991,  
246 Székely and Williams 1995).

247 The results consistently show that colonial breeding is associated with more equal share in parenting  
248 duties than in solitary species, especially in post-hatching care. We think the interaction of two factors  
249 could explain the outcome. First, intraspecific competition induces the cooperation between the male  
250 and the female parent, since one of the parents has to protect the fragile broods which are completely

251 exposed to the environment, while the other parent competes for food which is used to feed the  
252 offspring. Both chick feeding and chick guarding are involved in post-hatching state, therefore, the  
253 association between colonial breeding and share in post-hatching care between two sexes is observed  
254 in all models. Second, females in a colony synchronously produce the offspring (Gochfeld 1980, Nelson  
255 1980, Coulson 2002), which remarkably reduces the mating opportunities of a deserting male and  
256 consequently favors the emergence of biparental care. This outcome demonstrates that equal parental  
257 roles are selected under resource and mating constraints in colonial species, whereas female-biased  
258 care, mediated by other factors, is favored in solitary species.

259 Our results demonstrate that nest type does not predict sex-specific parental roles. In the pre-hatching  
260 and post-hatching phases, both parents provide care in open nests and closed nests. In the open nests,  
261 high predation rates might induce the same response by the male parent and the female parent. Both  
262 the male and the female decrease their parental activities around the nests in order to reduce nest  
263 visibility, or alternatively, both parents provide more protection against nest predation. In the closed  
264 nests with large clutch size, the cooperation between parents is required as large amount of energy  
265 and time are needed to raise the offspring. However, we neglected other factors which might be  
266 important to explore the relationship between nest habitat and parental roles. For instance, nest sites  
267 are essential for breeding success in that good nest sites might promote the development of the  
268 offspring (e.g., open nests which are built on the water or in the trees can help to reduce the probability  
269 of being predated (Martin 1993; Picman et al. 1993; Colombelli-Négrel and Kleindorfer 2009; Latif et  
270 al. 2012)). Further studies investigating the effect of nest microhabitats on sex differences in parental  
271 roles will be valuable.

272 Our results also illustrate that food type cannot explain the considerable variation in parental sex roles:  
273 no matter plant or animal food the bird parents forage, the female and the male take care of the  
274 offspring together. This suggests both plant-eating and animal-eating offspring might have high  
275 demand for food: herbivores request large amount of food while carnivores require high quality but  
276 secluded food, inducing biparental care in most of species. Nonetheless, our study did not directly  
277 quantify the food availability which is crucial for breeding activities (Martin 1987; Low et al. 2012),  
278 since just few empirical data are available. To dig into the impact of diet on parental roles, more  
279 empirical studies on food availability are needed in the future. Besides, our study did not take into  
280 account the situation where males feed the females during incubation in some avian species (Martin  
281 and Ghalambor 1999, Matysioková et al. 2011). Male feeding should be considered as a type of  
282 parental care as well, since it increases the survival probability of females and also the ability of females  
283 to provide continuous incubation of the eggs, which consequently increases the survival probability of  
284 the offspring. The food items which are fed to females might also play an important role in sex role  
285 divergence.

286 In summary, our study provides the most comprehensive analyses of the effect of ecology and social  
287 environment on sex differences in parental roles using birds as model organisms. We show that  
288 ecological factors such as diet and nest type are not predictors of parental roles, although these factors  
289 have strong impacts on some life-history traits. Besides, we found that social environment as  
290 coloniality could predict parental care strategies. Further studies including empirical and comparative  
291 analyses are needed to explore the relationship between food availability, nest habitats, breeding  
292 density and parental sex roles.

293

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