

The Artistic Life of Birds

Can birds create art? Yes, Bower birds build elaborate sculptures to attract a mate, cranes do elaborately choreographed dances to secure their pair bonds, song birds trill love songs that inspired Mozart, penguins present aesthetically shaped rock gifts to potential partners, and more. Is there a kind of beauty that all species – even humans – appreciate equally?

An overlooked aspect of birds is the significance of beauty in their lives. New scientific work indicates that aesthetic values in birds may actually determine the evolution of their species. Birds' vivid colors and lilting songs are not a mere chance development. Art may be necessary for their existence. Evolution is no longer just "survival of the fittest"; it is now also "survival of the most beautiful".

Join us while we explore the amazing artistic choices that influence the behavior of birds during mate selection, nest building, chick raising and communication. Long before humans appeared, birds were making art. Bower Birds made sculptures; birds-of-paradise pirouetted in feather tutus, songbirds made music, crows made tools, and nuthatches used geometry to hide their nuts.

Leader: Wendy Worth is an art historian and has an MA in conservation biology.

Tuesdays: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 6 weeks: February 26 through April 2

Location: The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville