

IT'S NOT ONLY HUMANS THAT BOOGIE...BIRDS CAN TOO!



ELEONORA COCKATOO
A common species in
overseas aviculture
Photo: Ulises Muñiz

A study in the United States, published in the journal *Current Biology*, claims some parrots have a near-perfect sense of rhythm and can move their bodies and tap their feet in time with music.

Snowball, an Eleonora Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, *Cacatua galerita leonora*, whose dance moves to "Everybody" by the *Backstreet Boys* became a YouTube hit, inspired Dr Aniruddh Patel, from The Neurosciences Institute in San Diego, to investigate the matter. He found that the bird's previous owner usually liked listening to "easy listening music", but did have one album of the Backstreet Boys. Whenever he played this he noticed Snowball bobbing his head to the beat.


To ensure that Snowball hadn't just learnt the one dance routine, the scientific team filmed him as they played his favourite song at different tempos. They analysed the videos frame by frame, and found the bird did synchronise with the beat; he slowed down and sped up in time to the music. The team was really surprised by his flexibility.

The scientists surmise that the bird's ability to dance might be shared with the ability for vocal learning and vocal imitation. To test their theory, the researchers analysed more than 1000 videos of dancing animals on YouTube. Of these only 33 were considered to be moving to the music's beat. The 33 were made up of 15 species, all of which are vocal learners, and comprised 14 parrots and an Asian Elephant.



"Alex" the African Grey
one of the 14 parrots
that showed the ability to
keep time with music.

The Eleonora Sulphur-crest is also known as the Medium Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, and inhabits the Aru Islands and Indonesia.

[If you wish to see Snowball in action, just  "Dancing Parrots"]

R.V.C.