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| Correspondence between Peter Grant and Don Kroodsma |  |  |  |
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**Thursday, June 15, 2023.**

**To Peter Grant (**[**prgrant@princeton.edu**](mailto:prgrant@princeton.edu)**), from Don Kroodsma**

Hello Peter:

It's been a long time since we communicated. I think it was back when Tracey Werner was studying on Cocos Island.

I wondered if I could ask you a question??

It would be something like "What has been the contribution of Jeff Podos to understanding the biology of Darwin's Finches?"

I'd value any thoughts that you might have, and whatever you write will be held in confidence unless you agree otherwise.

Perhaps it's only fair to tell you why I'm asking. The second link below explains some. In brief, I am convinced that every paper Jeff has ever written has been an exercise in deception. Important negative details are omitted from every scientific paper so that the story is better, but the story is built on half-truths and therefore inevitably false. It is my opinion that Jeff has done enormous damage to the scientific study of birdsong by creating these false stories, and I'm trying to get the administration at UMass to address the issue.

best . . . Don Kroodsma

[http://DonaldKroodsma.com/](http://donaldkroodsma.com/)

[Birdsong Performance Studies: A Contrary View | Donald Kroodsma](http://donaldkroodsma.com/?page_id=1596)

**Friday, June 16, 2023**

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| **From Peter Grant to Don Kroodsma, copy to Rosemary Grant** |  |

Hello Don,

I am saddened by your message, by the substance, and by the position you are in of finding you distrust a scientific colleague in your own department.

I am traveling in Switzerland and will give you a response to your question as best as I can. I return to Princeton in mid-July and at that time I could check the literature to confirm the facts as I remember them. In the meantime you can use the following in whatever way may be helpful.

"I am able to comment on the contribution Jeff Podos has made to understanding Darwin’s finch biology. In short, the work has been a stimulus to the field. A paper in Nature presented a cogent case for beak dimensions affecting quantitative features of song production. The second contribution from Sarah Huber and Jeff was evidence of assortative pairing on the basis of beak size. Song features were implicated as important enabling cues or variables. I will comment on the first, much-cited, contribution of beaks affecting song features.

We supplied Jeff with a small sample of recordings from Daphne for his Nature paper. There was no significant beak-song association on Daphne in the paper, contrary to his finding with much larger samples of the same species (*Geospiza fortis*) from Santa Cruz Island.

I was somewhat skeptical of the positive result because it paid insufficient attention to the massive work of Robert Bowman (1983) on Darwin’s finch song. Bowman classified the songs of finches into fast and slow versions that he interpreted as original and derived. Whether correct or not in his interpretations, he clearly demonstrated inter-individual variation in song features (frequency and temporal pattern). Our results on Daphne have shown that as many as four types of song are sung by a population, but that finch individuals sing only one song type (with very few exceptions) through their lives. The unexplored question from the Nature paper was whether song type variation was an important missing variable.

Since then we have attempted to test the hypothesis of a beak-song relationship in our studies on Daphne in the same way that Jeff did, and all tests have yielded negative results. I have not seen any explanation for why the beak-song relationship should be present on one island and not another, nor can I think of one.

There is a more fundamental problem that arises from flexibility in finch song learning. Bowman found that male finches acquire their song through learning, typically from their father, but very rarely they learn and sing the song of another species with a very different beak size and shape. The source is a male on a neighboring territory. Our research has shown that heterospecific copying is so accurate that males of the copied species respond to it aggressively whereas males of the singer's own species ignore it. This observation is completely inconsistent with the Podos hypothesis. Indeed the hypothesis predicts the opposite: that finch song is determined by conspecifically inherited beak size and finches are incapable of singing faithful copies of the songs of species with different beak sizes.

Our 2014 book “40 Years of Evolution. Darwin’s Finches on Daphne Major Island” provides more detail and references.

I can add one more piece of contrary evidence. Our playback experiments on the island of Genovesa demonstrated that *Geospiza acutirostris* respond to the similar song of a closely related species (*G. septentrionalis*) from northern islands despite very large differences between these populations in all three beak dimensions.

In summary the Nature paper was a stimulus to the field of bird song, but the stimulus has faded as we have failed to replicate the main result.”

With best wishes,

Peter

**Friday, June 16, 2023**

**From Don Kroodsma to Peter and Rosemary Grant**

Hi Peter (and Rosemary):

Thank you for your response, especially while you are traveling.

The essence of your email comes as no surprise to me . . . i.e., Jeff's paper was a stimulus to the field but, in the end, the results could not be replicated.

It is exactly the same story in the birdsong performance literature. Jeff basically claims to have discovered the Holy Grail of how birds assess one another, and he was, as you say, "a stimulus to the field."

Innumerable papers followed, by Jeff and his students, and by others in the field, all confirming the exciting nature of Jeff's discovery.

Careful study of every one of Jeff's papers on this topic, however, reveals that all contrary evidence and alternative explanations for the phenomenon were omitted from the papers.

It is Jeff at his best, promoting some exciting new explanation for a phenomenon, but concealing from the readers all the negative evidence that reveals why the explanation cannot be true.

There is none of Feynman's "scientific integrity" in papers by Podos.

The problem is that Jeff's papers are taken at face value, as if they are solid, honest attempts at communicating good science. They are anything but that.

They are instead, well, I guess "bullshit" is the best way to describe them (Dictionary definition: "to talk [nonsense](https://www.google.com/search?q=nonsense&si=AMnBZoFm76bvId4K9j6r5bU9rVYrNaApeTB-mUiLHd6haUjX5oqQCMWKBxJdWD8E501Cr7jQbRDBw1xNwcZsBdF0-GMfvw3xIw%3D%3D&expnd=1) to (someone), typically to be misleading or [deceptive](https://www.google.com/search?q=deceptive&si=AMnBZoFEI0LGJdD1jElhAGFwRnmonjmHi_iyuMYVcDGn4V-jeUC7Djq23x6Gh6wHzS2h0v5afSeQvP_q-oiqjA5fMk6LeCjx2g%3D%3D&expnd=1)").

They are self-promotional works of art, at the expense of a research field.

There are multiple crimes that result, in my opinion, but the worst is that these "exciting but false" papers destroy the integrity of a research field (and science in general). They send multiple other scientists down dead ends, wasting resources and time (How much time did you spend testing Jeff's hypothesis?), stymying advances in the field that might otherwise have been made.

In my opinion, and I've thought about this issue for 20+ years as I've watched Jeff . . . watched him with his graduate students searching for "the hook" (whether real or not) that will excite others about their work . . . watched him send his grad students off to scientific meetings to tell their highly coached, false tales (and win their best student paper awards) . . . and studied innumerable papers of his . . . Yes, I've thought about these issues all too long . . . and my inevitable conclusion is, quite simply, that Jeff is a fraud. That's a strong word, but I'll stick with it.

It's an unsavory mess. In my opinion, every one of Jeff's research papers should simply be retracted until proven truthful, i.e., guilty until proven innocent.

But the damage is done. I don't know how to undo the damage or how to stop it. But I will probably have one more GO at the UMass administration and the departmental chair and committees.

best . . . Don

PS--Perhaps you are aware of this, sent to me by a colleague . . . Another example of Jeff's magic that must be revisited to rectify . . .

**Goller, F.** 2017. Sound production and modification in birds – mechanisms, methodology and open questions. Pp. 165-230 in: *Comparative Bioacoustics: An Overview* (C. Brown & T. Riede, Eds.). Bentham Science Publishers, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

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