



February 22, 2023

Collis B. Temple III
Chair
Louisiana Board of Regents

Via e-mail: ctemple@primerica.com

Dear Mr. Temple:

I hope this letter finds you well. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) regarding funding provided by the Louisiana Board of Regents to Christine Lattin, an assistant professor at Louisiana State University (LSU), for a project titled "The Neurobiology of Resilience to Environmental Challenges." A recently posted manuscript authored by Lattin and her colleagues—which acknowledges funding from the Board of Regents—renews our concerns that the harm inflicted on vulnerable and sensitive songbirds who are trapped, experimented on, and killed in Lattin's studies cannot be justified by the underwhelming findings of the work.

The Board of Regents has a highly commendable mission and vision—to develop talent "through quality, affordable postsecondary education for all," acknowledging that such education "transforms lives, strengthens communities, and drives our economy." We do not believe that Lattin's project furthers these admirable objectives, and we again respectfully request that the tax dollars of Louisiana residents not be used to fund cruel and, frankly, ridiculous experiments like these.

In a recently posted manuscript, "[Estradiol and Predator Cues Affect Behavior and Brain Responses of Captive Female House Sparrows \(*Passer Domesticus*\)](#)," Lattin and her coauthors describe capturing 33 female house sparrows using mist nets at bird feeders in East Baton Rouge Parish between 2020 and 2022. The experimenters caged the birds in Lattin's laboratory at LSU, and after four weeks of "acclimation," they surgically implanted silicone capsules under the skin on the birds' backs. Some capsules were filled with the hormone estradiol, while others were left empty. After one week, the capsules were surgically removed. The birds were then placed alone in acoustic chambers, where for 30 minutes half of them were exposed to male love songs while the other half were exposed to the calls of predators. An hour after the acoustic exposure, the birds were killed and their brains were excised and analyzed.

The hypothesis of this work was that female birds—when placed in an artificially induced "breeding condition" through the administration of estradiol—would tune out the calls of predators. However, estradiol was found to have no effect on how the birds responded to the apparent presence of predators, and the hypothesis was deemed false—a hardly surprising outcome, since one would expect survival instincts honed by natural selection to override any amorous drive. In fact, increased vigilance during reproduction is an already established

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Entities:

- PETA Asia
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finding in birds.^{1,2,3} Predictably, both sets of birds engaged in freezing behavior in response to the calls of predators.

Despite finding no behavioral effects of estradiol in response to predatory calls, the experimenters chose to kill the birds and measure gene expression in several brain regions. Unsurprisingly given the lack of any estradiol-dependent differences in freezing behavior in response to predatory calls, immediate early gene expression in the birds was the same in response to predator sounds, independent of hormone condition. Similarly, it's not surprising that gene expression was comparable whether birds were exposed to the sounds of a male sparrow or a predator, given the literature suggesting females are vigilant in response to both mating and predatory calls.

It's difficult to imagine a study with more underwhelming findings than this one—and the fact that birds were captured, confined, subjected to invasive procedures, and then killed makes the experiments that much more indefensible. We therefore reiterate our request to you that the Board of Regents stop squandering valuable funds on experiments like those conducted by Lattin, which harm vulnerable animals and fail to provide useful information that advances science, human welfare, or animal welfare. We urge you to redirect any remaining funds for her experiments to ethical and deserving projects instead.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Katherine Roe, Ph.D.
Chief, Science Advancement and Outreach

¹Emmering QC, Schmidt KA. Nesting songbirds assess spatial heterogeneity of predatory chipmunks by eavesdropping on their vocalizations. *J Anim Ecol.* 2011;80(6):1305-1312.

²Policht R, Hart V, Goncharov D, et al. Vocal recognition of a nest-predator in black grouse. *PeerJ.* 2019;7:e6533.

³Lima SL. Predators and the breeding bird: behavioral and reproductive flexibility under the risk of predation. *Biol Rev Camb Philos Soc.* 2009;84(3):485-513.