

Abstract

Elongated tail feathers and tail coverts of birds are used as a textbook example of exaggerated secondary sexual characters evolved through sexual selection via female choice. The female tendency to prefer males with the most elaborate ornaments can be explained on the basis of a positive genetic correlation between the preference and the ornament. Alternatively, an elaborated ornament can indicate good quality and heritable viability of the male and therefore, choosing the most ornamented male, the female chooses for „good genes“ for her offsprings. Sexual ornaments can impose negative effects on a different aspect of the individual's life. The compensation for these disadvantages should be enhanced reproductive success of the ornamented males. This thesis aims to summarize main findings of the role of elongated tail feathers in sexual selection in birds, concerning their effects on viability and attractiveness of males in different mating systems. It provides an illustrating overview of the occurrence of elongated tail feathers in birds, and puts together available evidence of fitness benefits associated with elongated tail feathers in males. Despite a pervasive interest in the signalling function of tail feather ornaments in birds, most research focuses on only a few model taxa, with often incongruent results as to the link between elongated tail feathers and male attractiveness.

Key words

Elongated tail feather, sexual selection, exaggerated sexual characters, barn swallow, birds, signalling