Title

The gene expression profile of the song control nucleus HVC shows sex specificity, hormone responsiveness, and species specificity among songbirds

Author affiliation

Meng-Ching Ko[*] (ORCID 0000-0002-2234-9380)

Carolina Frankl-Vilches[*]

Antje Bakker[*]

Manfred Gahr[*]

[*]Department of Behavioural Neurobiology, Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, Eberhard-Gwinner Straße 6a, 82319 Seewiesen, Germany

Corresponding author

Meng-Ching Ko

E-mail: mcko@orn.mpg.de

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Abstract

Singing occurs in songbirds of both sexes, but some species show typical degrees of sex-specific performance. We studied the transcriptional sex differences in the HVC, a brain nucleus critical for song pattern generation, of the forest weaver (*Ploceus bicolor*), the blue-capped cordon-bleu (*Uraeginthus cyanocephalus*), and the canary (*Serinus canaria*), which are species that show low, medium, and high levels of sex-specific singing, respectively. We observed persistent sex differences in gene expression levels regardless of the species-specific sexual singing phenotypes. We further studied the HVC transcriptomes of defined phenotypes of canary, known for its testosterone-sensitive seasonal singing. By studying both sexes of canaries during both breeding and nonbreeding seasons, nonbreeding canaries treated with testosterone, and spontaneously singing females, we found that the circulating androgen levels and sex were the predominant variables associated with the variations in the HVC transcriptomes. The comparison of natural singing with testosterone-induced singing in canaries of the same sex revealed considerable differences in the HVC transcriptomes. Strong transcriptional changes in the HVC were detected during the transition from nonsinging to singing in canaries of both sexes. Although the sex-specific genes of singing females shared little resemblance with those of males, our analysis showed potential functional convergences. Thus, male and female songbirds achieve comparable singing behaviours with sex-specific transcriptomes.

Introduction

Most of the genomes of male and female individuals of the same species are the same but stark sex differences in physiological, phenotypical, or behavioural traits between the sexes are common and widespread in the animal kingdom. The songbird clade (a suborder of the perching birds) consists of more than 4000 extant avian species, and these exhibit a great diversity of sex differences in singing behaviour. Among domesticated canaries (*Serinus canaria*), males are known for their singing behaviour and have been selected for their sophisticated songs for centuries, whereas female canaries seldom sing (Hartley et al., 1997; Herrick and Harris, 1957; Ko et al., 2020; Pesch and Güttinger, 1985; Shoemaker, 1939; Vallet et al., 1996). Such substantial sex differences in singing behaviour are commonly found in the majority of northern temperate songbird species, even though females of many tropical and southern temperate species sing regularly, and their songs play an important role in inter-sexual communication (Hall et al., 2015; Price, 2019; Price et al., 2009; Slater and Mann, 2004). For example, female blue-capped cordon-bleus (*Uraeginthus cyanocephalus*) use their song as advertising signals and address their songs to their mates (Immelmann, 1968; Ota et al., 2018), although the female songs appear shorter and less complex than those of males (Geberzahn and Gahr, 2011). In another tropical songbird species, forest weavers (*Ploceus bicolor*), males and females develop their songs during pair binding and eventually learn to sing identical duets, which they use to defend their territories (Wickler and Seibt, 1980).

Although the extent of sex differences in singing behaviour varies greatly in the songbird clade (Ball, 2016), the song quality and occurrence in males and females of many songbird species are dependent on testosterone (Dittrich et al., 2014; Fusani et al., 2003; Ko et al., 2020; Leitner et al., 2001b; Nottebohm et al., 1987; Voigt and Leitner, 2008). In canaries that breed seasonally, the optimal breeding conditions are tightly associated with an increase in the day length, which initiates gonadal growth and testosterone production as well as various types of breeding activity, including singing (Leitner et al., 2001b; Nottebohm et al., 1987; Voigt and Leitner, 2008). The length and syllable repetition rate of songs during the breeding season are greater than those of songs in nonbreeding seasons (Leitner et al., 2001a; Leitner et al., 2001b; Voigt and Leitner, 2008). Castrated male canaries sing shorter songs than sham-operated males, and the subcutaneous implantation of testosterone results in the recovery of singing performance (Heid et al., 1985). The local administration of testosterone into the preoptic brain region increases the male canary singing rate by increasing motivation (Alward et al., 2013). Similarly, the systemic administration of testosterone reliably and repeatedly induces

singing behaviour in otherwise nonsinging female canaries (Fusani et al., 2003; Herrick and Harris, 1957; Leonard, 1939; Madison et al., 2015; Nottebohm, 1980; Shoemaker, 1939; Vellema et al., 2019b). Although female canaries rarely exhibit spontaneous singing (Hartley et al., 1997; Herrick and Harris, 1957; Ko et al., 2020; Pesch and Güttinger, 1985; Shoemaker, 1939; Vallet et al., 1996), its occurrence appears to be associated with the plasma androgen levels (Ko et al., 2020).

A set of interconnected neural circuits called the song control system controls the production and learning of singing behaviour (Nottebohm et al., 1976; Wild, 2004). The premotor nucleus HVC (used as the proper name), which is a sensorimotor integration centre in the song control system, is involved in the frequency and temporal modulation of songs in male and female songbirds (Hahnloser et al., 2002; Hoffmann et al., 2019) and in the sexual preferences regarding conspecific song displays (Brenowitz, 1991; Del Negro et al., 1998). The HVC is the only brain nucleus within the song control system that expresses receptors for both androgens and estrogens (Frankl-Vilches and Gahr, 2018; Gahr, 2001). Intriguingly, the anatomical properties of the HVC, such as volume (Figure 1), neuron number, and dendrite complexity, are male-biased (greater, higher and more complex, respectively, in males than in females) in all songbird species that have been examined, irrespective of the existence of sex differences in singing behaviour (Brenowitz et al., 1985; Gahr et al., 2008; Gahr et al., 1998; Gurney and Konishi, 1980; Hall et al., 2010; Lobato et al., 2015; MacDougall-Shackleton and Ball, 1999; Nixdorf et al., 1989; Nottebohm and Arnold, 1976; Schwabl et al., 2015). Testosterone treatment increases the delineable volume of the HVC in both male and female canaries (Fusani et al., 2003; Madison et al., 2015; Nottebohm, 1980) and many other species (Bernard and Ball, 1997; Dittrich et al., 2014; Gulledge and Deviche, 1999; Smith et al., 1997; Van Meir et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the HVC volume of female canaries implanted with testosterone remains markedly smaller than that of males (Nottebohm, 1980) (Figure 1). Testosterone clearly regulates singing behaviour and the anatomy of the HVC in both male and female songbirds. However, an intrinsic limit to the alterations induced by testosterone appears to exist, and this limit prevents female songbirds from reaching the same levels of "maleness" in terms of song characteristics and HVC anatomy.

How are such sex-specific differences in singing and HVC anatomy achieved in different species? We hypothesize the existence of a fundamental difference in gene regulation and expression between male and female conspecific songbirds. Based on this hypothesis, sex differences in the HVC transcriptomes of male and female conspecifics should always be observable, even though both sexes share an almost identical genome.

The female-specific W chromosome harbours 30-50 genes, whereas one and two copies of the Z chromosome (harbouring approximately 1,080 genes) are present in female and male birds, respectively (Frankl-Vilches et al., 2015; Sayers et al., 2020; Smeds et al., 2015). We further hypothesize that such intrinsic differences cannot be overwritten by manipulating the testosterone level in females. To test our hypotheses, we compared the transcriptomes of HVCs microdissected from three songbird species—the forest weaver, the blue-capped cordon-bleu, and the canary. These species represent three categories of sex differences in singing behaviour (low, medium, and high). Furthermore, we compared male and female canaries with and without testosterone implantation to evaluate the effects of testosterone (Table 1). The results revealed sex differences in the HVC transcriptome between- and within-species comparisons. Our results indicate that although the extent of sex-biased gene expression is context-dependent, it is persistent regardless of hormonal manipulation, behavioural phenotypes, and distinct genetic backgrounds.

Materials and methods

Animals

Forest weaver (*Ploceus bicolor*) pairs were observed in their breeding territories in eastern South Africa; the songs of the pairs were recorded to ensure that both mates were singing. Subsequently, the animals were caught and sacrificed in accordance with permits issued by the local authorities (Chief Professional Officer for Research at the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board, P. O. B. 662, Pietermaritzburg 3200). Blue-capped cordon-bleus (*Uraeginthus cyanocephalus*) and canaries (*Serinus canaria*) were bred at the animal facilities at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Seewiesen, Germany. The procedures used for animal housing and welfare complied with the European directives for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes (2010/63/EU), and the protocols were approved by the Government of Upper Bavaria (AZ No. 55.2-1-54-2532-181-12). Adult canaries and blue-capped cordon-bleus (aged at least 1 year) were housed in pairs under long-day conditions (light:dark = 14:10 hours), and their breeding activities were monitored. The birds (male canaries and cordon-bleus) were sacrificed after singing activity was observed during the breeding season. Nonbreeding canaries were housed pairwise with a 9-hour light:15-hour dark schedule for at least 8 weeks before their singing activity was monitored (generally starting in late September). Nonbreeding male and female canaries were maintained alone in sound-attenuated boxes (70 × 50 × 50 cm), recorded continuously during the song monitoring phase (two weeks)

145 and sacrificed after confirmation of no singing activity. Additional groups of male and
146 female nonbreeding and nonsinging canaries were implanted with testosterone for 2
147 weeks and sacrificed after observation of singing activity. Water and food were available
148 *ad libitum*. The sex was confirmed by PCR using the P2 and P8 primers for CHD genes
149 (Griffiths et al., 1998) and by visual inspection of the reproduction system after sacrifice.
150 We previously found that six nonbreeding female canaries exhibited singing behaviour
151 during long-term monitoring, and their songs have been described in detail (Ko et al.,
152 2020). In this study, we included the transcriptomes of these birds. All the birds were
153 sacrificed via an overdose of isoflurane followed by decapitation, the body weights were
154 recorded, and the brains were dissected, weighed, snap-frozen on dry ice and stored at -
155 80°C until further use. Table 1 summarizes the information of the experimental groups
156 used in this study.

157 **Testosterone implantation**

158 A Silastic™ tube (Dow Corning; 1.47-mm inner diameter, 1.96-mm outer diameter, 0.23-
159 mm thickness) was cut to a length of 7 mm and loaded with testosterone (86500, Fluka)
160 as densely as possible. The two ends of the Silastic™ tube were sealed with silicone
161 elastomer (3140, Dow Corning). After closure, the implants were cleaned with 100%
162 ethanol to remove testosterone particles and then immersed in ethanol overnight in a
163 hood to ensure no leakage at either end. Implants with apparent dampness were
164 discarded. One day prior to the implantation, the implants were incubated in 0.1 M
165 phosphate buffered saline (PBS) overnight to enable the immediate release of
166 testosterone upon implantation (Rasika et al., 1994). We started implantation at
167 approximately 8:30 am (immediately after the light was turned on in the morning), which
168 resulted in a 20-minute interval between birds based on the scarification time. A small
169 incision was made on the back of the bird over the pectoral musculature, and one
170 testosterone implant was placed subcutaneously. The skin was closed by the application
171 of tissue glue. After 2 weeks, the animals were sacrificed. The testosterone implants were
172 checked, and this inspection revealed that the implants were all in place and were not
173 empty at the end of the experiments.

174 **Radioimmunoassay of plasma testosterone**

175 Blood was sampled (< 150 μl) at the time sacrifice. All blood samples were taken between
176 8 and 11 am and were taken within 3 min after caught to avoid the effect of handling
177 (Wingfield et al., 1982). Blood samples were centrifuged (5,000 rpm, 10 min) to separate

178 the plasma from blood cells. Testosterone metabolites were measured with a
179 radioimmunoassay using a commercial antiserum against testosterone (T3-125,
180 Endocrine Sciences, Tarzana, USA) as previously described (Goymann et al., 2002).
181 Standard curves and sample concentrations were calculated with Immunofit 3.0
182 (Beckman Inc. Fullerton, CA) using a four-parameter logistic curve fit and corrected for
183 individual recoveries.

184 The testosterone concentrations were assayed in duplicate in five separate assays. The
185 mean extraction efficiency for plasma testosterone was 85.0 ± 3.9% (mean ± SD, N = 42).
186 The lower detection limits of the testosterone assays were 0.34, 0,35, 0.36, 0.38 and 0.35
187 pg per tube, and all the samples were above the detection limit. The intra-assay
188 coefficients of variation of a chicken plasma pool were 8.7%, 3.4%, 12.8%, 1.9%, and
189 4.4%. The interassay coefficient of variation as determined by the variation in the chicken
190 plasma pool between all the assays was 5.1%. Because the testosterone antibody used
191 shows significant cross-reactions with 5α-dihydrotestosterone (44%), our measurement
192 might include a fraction of 5α-DHT.

193 **Brain sectioning**

194 The birds were killed by an overdose of isoflurane, and their brains were snap-frozen on
195 dry ice. The brains were sectioned sagittally into four series of 40-µm sections and two
196 series of 20-µm sections with a cryostat (Jung CM3000 Leica). The 40-µm sections were
197 mounted on glass slides for subsequent tissue dissection for total RNA extraction,
198 whereas the thin sections were mounted on RNase-free Superfrost slides for Nissl
199 staining and measurement of the HVC volume. All sections were stored at -80°C until
200 further processing.

201 **Measurement of the HVC volume**

202 One series of 20-µm sections mounted on RNase-free Superfrost slides was subjected to
203 Nissl staining with 0.1% thionin (Sigma-Aldrich), dehydrated, immersed in xylene and
204 cover-slipped with Roti-Histokitt II mounting medium (Roth). The HVC areas (typically 8-
205 10 slices) were measured with a Leica DM6000 B microscope connected to a computer-
206 based image-analysis system (IMAtec). All brains were coded such that the observers
207 were blind towards any additional information about the sections they measured during
208 the delineations. The volumes were derived from the summed area measurements
209 multiplied by the section thickness and the intersection distance.

210 **Microarray procedures and annotation**

211 For total RNA extraction, the song control nucleus HVC and the visual area of the
212 entopallium were dissected from the abovementioned 40-µm sections under a
213 stereomicroscope (typically 24-32 slices for the HVC and 16-20 slices for the entopallium)
214 and transferred into an Eppendorf tube containing 340 µl of RLT buffer mixture
215 (containing DTT, Qiagen). This dissection procedure using rather thin sections reduces
216 the contamination of HVC tissue with surrounding tissue. RNA was then extracted using
217 the RNeasy® Micro Kit (Qiagen) with the optional DNase digest step. The RNA quality
218 was assessed using the Agilent Model 2100 Bioanalyzer (Agilent Technologies), and the
219 RNA concentrations were assessed using a Nanodrop 1000 spectrometer (Thermo Fisher
220 Scientific). The RNA quality of all samples was good (RIN > 7). The purified total RNA
221 samples (at least 100 ng per sample) were subsequently processed and hybridized using
222 the Ambion WT Expression Kit and the Affymetrix WT Terminal Labelling and Controls
223 Kit. The resulting cDNA was hybridized to the Custom Affymetrix Gene Chip® MPIO-
224 ZF1s520811 Exon Array, which has been used successfully and validated in cross-species
225 hybridization studies (Dittrich et al., 2014; Frankl-Vilches et al., 2015). The 5.7 million
226 male zebra finch-specific probes spotted on this array correspond to approximately
227 4,711,133 probe sets and hence to 25,816 transcripts published in public databases (NCBI
228 and Ensembl) (Warren et al., 2010). We annotated more than 90% of the transcripts to
229 12,729 human orthologous genes using several publicly available databases (Ensembl,
230 GenBank, UniProt, and DAVID (Benson et al., 2005; Consortium, 2015; Flicek et al., 2014;
231 Huang et al., 2008, 2009; Yates et al., 2016)) and commercial databases (El Dorado,
232 Genomatix, Precigen Bioinformatics Germany GmbH (PBG), Munich, Germany).
233 Hybridization was performed for 16 hours at 45°C and 60 rpm in a GeneChip
234 Hybridization Oven 640 (Affymetrix). The arrays were washed, stained, and scanned
235 using the Affymetrix GeneChip Fluidics Station 450 and the Affymetrix GeneChip scanner
236 3000 7G. The CEL files were generated using Affymetrix® GeneChip® Command
237 Console® Software (AGCC), and for quality control, the success of individual
238 hybridizations was assessed using Affymetrix® Expression Console™ software.

239 Differential expression was calculated using ChipInspector software version 21 (El
240 Dorado Database version E28R1306 (Genomatix)). ChipInspector is a single probe-based
241 analysis tool for microarray data that can show increased sensitivity compared with that
242 obtained with conventional probe set-based analyses, such as robust multiarray analysis.
243 ChipInspector consists of four steps: single probe-transcript annotation (ensuring up-to-
244 date annotation), total intensity normalization, SAM (significance analysis of microarrays,

245 adapted to single-probe handling) analysis (Tusher et al., 2001), and transcript
246 identification based on significantly changed probes (Cohen et al., 2008). We set the delta
247 threshold to 0 (to control the false positive rate) and used the groupwise exhaustive
248 comparison tool in ChipInspector. The minimum coverage for each transcript was set to
249 10 significant probes, and the minimum expression difference was $|\log_2(\text{fold change})| \geq$
250 0.5. The significantly differentially expressed transcripts obtained were annotated to
251 human orthologous genes as described above. For transcripts belonging to the same
252 genes, the average expression was calculated if all transcripts were regulated in the same
253 manner (e.g., all upregulated or all downregulated). If a gene contains both up- or
254 downregulated transcripts, the transcripts that showed changes in expression in the
255 minority direction were discarded (<40% of the total transcripts), and the average
256 expression was instead calculated from the remaining transcripts (60% or more).
257 Transcripts without human orthologous gene annotation were removed prior to
258 subsequent analyses. We were cautious about possible cross-species bias in
259 hybridization, and differential expression analyses were only performed between two
260 conspecific groups. The microarray data discussed in this publication have been
261 deposited in NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus (Edgar et al., 2002) and are accessible
262 through the GEO Series accession number GSE83674.

263 **Hierarchical clustering**

264 The normalized gene expression levels (across all transcriptome samples) were
265 calculated using the "justRMA" function of the R package "affy" v1.66.0 (Gautier et al.,
266 2004), and the expression levels were further collapsed to gene levels using the
267 "collapseRows" functions of the R package "WGCNA" v1.69 (Langfelder and Horvath,
268 2008, 2012). The group-level expression levels were calculated by averaging the gene
269 expression levels. Spearman's ρ was calculated between samples (or groups) using the
270 "cor" function, and a Euclidean distance matrix was calculated (dist(1-cor)) and used for
271 hierarchical clustering analysis (method: complete) with the "hclust" function. This
272 computation was performed with R v4.0.2 (R_Core_Team, 2020) using the "dendextend"
273 v1.14.0 package for visualization (Galili, 2015).

274 **Principal component analysis (PCA)**

275 PCA (Ringner, 2008) was performed using the normalized and collapsed HVC gene
276 expression data (described in the hierarchical clustering section) from 41 canaries (Table
277 1). The computation was performed using the "pca" function of the R package

278 "pcaMethods" (v1.60.0 (Stacklies et al., 2007), method = svd). The data were centred but
279 not scaled because the expression data had already been normalized.

280 Fisher's exact testing for chromosomal enrichment

281 Fisher's exact test was used to test whether sex-biased genes were enriched on a
282 chromosome by comparing the gene lists of interest to the zebra finch annotation
283 (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genome/?term=zebra+finch). We used the "fisher.test"
284 function in R (R_Core_Team, 2020) with the alternative set to "greater" for enrichment.
285 The male- and female-biased genes identified from each comparison as well as the male-
286 specific, female-specific, and sex-shared genes were tested separately. The P values were
287 adjusted using the Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons using
288 "p.adjust" in R (R_Core_Team, 2020).

289 Gene Ontology (GO) term enrichment analysis

290 We used ClueGO v2.2.4, an application built in the Cytoscape environment v3.3.0 (Bindea
291 et al., 2009; Shannon et al., 2003), to predict the putative biological functions of the genes
292 of interest. This software performs GO term enrichment hierarchical analyses and fuses
293 GO terms with similar functions. The enrichment was determined by the right-sided test
294 and corrected using the Bonferroni step-down method considering multiple
295 comparisons.

296 Results and discussion

297 The species identity distinguishes its HVC transcriptomes

298 We quantified the total mRNA from the HVC of male and female birds belonging to three
299 songbird species (forest weavers, blue-capped cordon-bleus, and canaries) during the
300 breeding season (Table 1). For intraspecies sex comparisons, we included male and
301 female canaries during the nonbreeding seasons (both nonsinging), and subgroups were
302 treated with testosterone to induce singing behaviour in both sexes (Supplementary
303 Figure 1). In addition, we obtained a rare group of nonbreeding female canaries that sang
304 spontaneously without exogenous testosterone manipulation. However, their plasma
305 androgen levels were intrinsically higher than those of nonbreeding and nonsinging
306 females (Ko et al., 2020). To visualize the similarities in the gene expression patterns
307 among and within the three species, we calculated Spearman's rank correlation
308 coefficient σ for 12,360 gene expression levels and calculated the distance matrix based

on the coefficient σ. The resulting cladogram indicated that the HVC transcriptomes of the eleven groups were clustered primarily by phylogenetic relatedness (Figure 1B and Supplementary Figure 2). We obtained a similar result with the transcriptomes of another tissue, the entopallium (Supplementary Figure 3), which is an area of the avian visual system that is functionally equivalent to the primary visual cortex of mammals. The within-species comparison of the canary HVC showed that the individual transcriptomes clustered well by sex, with the exception of the nonbreeding canaries implanted with testosterone (Figure 1B and Supplementary Figure 2). The subclusters of forest weaver and cordon-bleu HVC transcriptomes were less sexually differential than those of canaries, i.e., male and female birds were intermittent within the subcluster of the two species (Supplementary Figure 2 and Supplementary Figure 3).

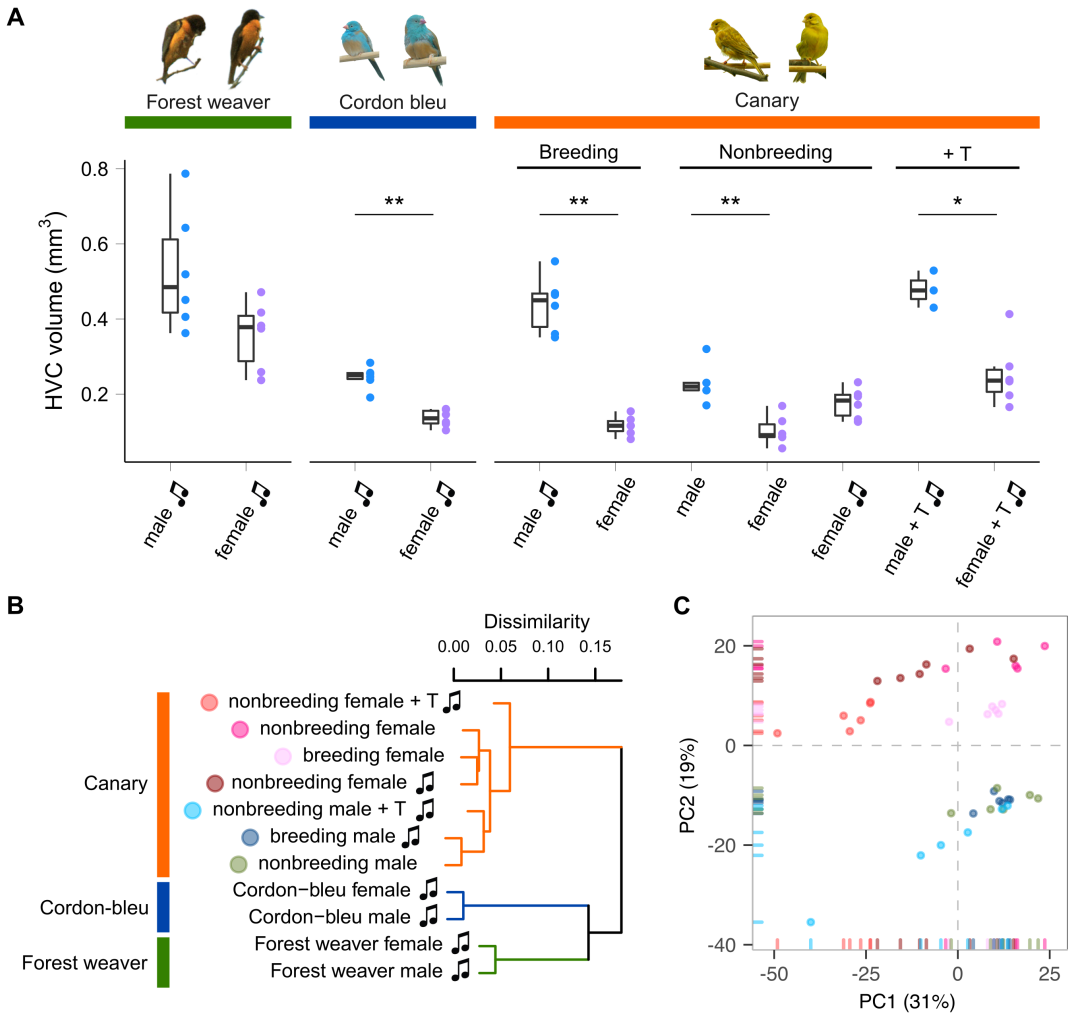


Figure 1. Species, sex, and plasma androgen level are the major determinants of the HVC gene expression patterns in songbirds.

A, HVC volume of birds used in this study. Forest weavers: males 0.528 mm^3 (mean), females 0.357 mm^3. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 7, P value = 0.0931. Cordon-bleus: males 0.245 mm^3, females 0.136

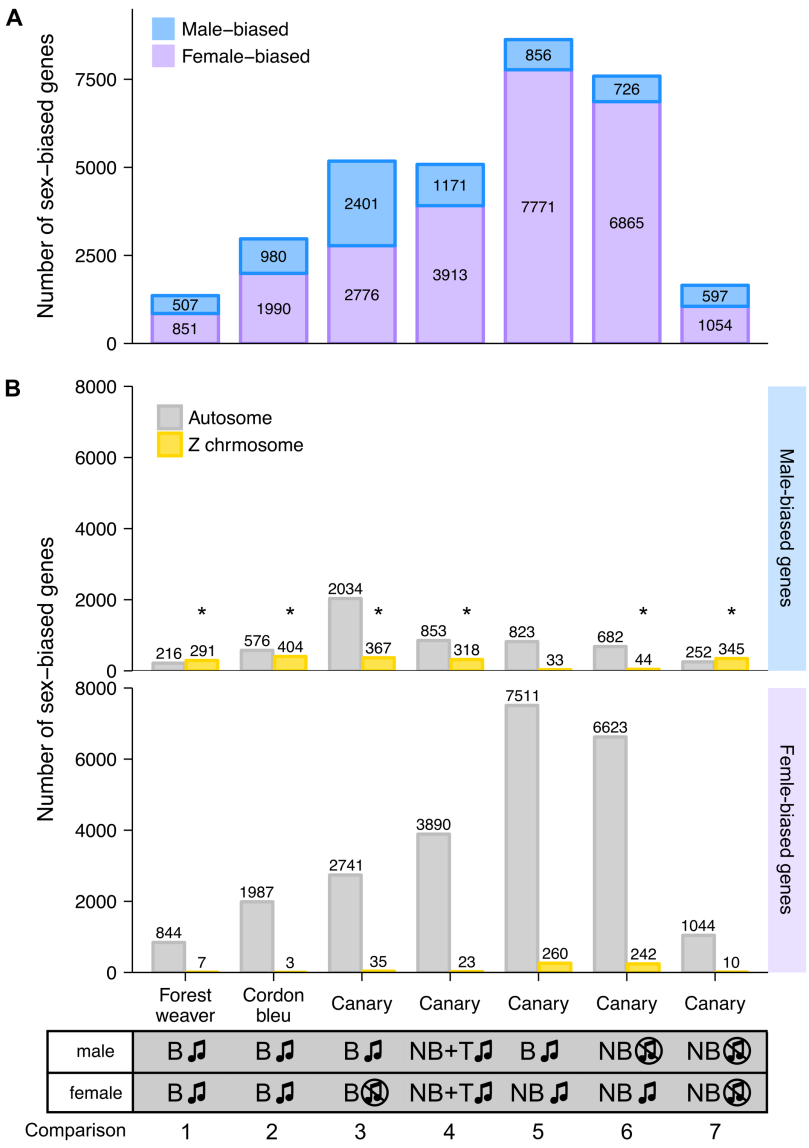
mm^3. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 0, P value = 0.00217. Breeding canaries: singing males 0.439 mm^3, nonsinging females 0.116 mm^3. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 0, P value = 0.00217. Nonbreeding canaries: nonsinging males 0.228 mm^3, nonsinging females 0.103 mm^3, singing females 0.176 mm^3. Mann-Whitney Test (nonsinging males vs. nonsinging females), U = 0, P value = 0.00492. Mann-Whitney Test (nonsinging males vs. singing females), U = 8, P value = 0.127. Testosterone-implanted canaries: males 0.478 mm^3, females 0.253 mm^3. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 0, P value = 0.0238. * P value < 0.05; ** P value < 0.01. Each colour-coded dot indicates the measurement from one bird. The boxes indicate the 25th/50th/75th percentiles (bottom/middle/top bar), and the extent of the whiskers indicates the most extreme values that are within 1.5 times the IQR (interquartile range) of the hinge. T: testosterone; music note: presence of singing behaviour. **B**, Hierarchical clustering showing that phylogenetic relatedness accounts for the most variation in the HVC transcriptomes of females and males of the forest weaver, cordon-bleu, and canary. Among the seven canary groups, the testosterone-treated animals were the least similar to the untreated canaries. **C**, A PCA of the HVC transcriptomes of the seven canary groups distinguished male birds (PC2 < 0) from female birds (PC2 > 0). Each point is colour-coded by group (see B) and represents an HVC sample.

Sex-biased gene expression in the HVC of songbirds

We defined the degree of sex differences in HVC gene expression levels as the number of sex-biased genes whose expression levels showed significant differences between males and females of the same species (male-biased genes showed higher expression levels in males than in females, $\log_2$ (fold change) ≥ 0.5; female-biased genes presented higher expression levels in females than in males, $\log_2$ (fold change) ≤ -0.5). For canary, we quantified the sex differences from five distinct male-to-female comparisons (Figure 2A, comparisons 3 to 7).

Interestingly, we found persistent sex differences in HVC gene expression levels from all the comparisons, regardless of the degree of sex differences in singing behaviour (Figure 2A). The majority (> 90%) of sex-biased genes were lowly biased (0.5 ≤ |$\log_2$ (fold change)| < 1, Supplementary Figure 4). The comparison of forest weaver (the female birds can sing identical songs to the males; least differences in the HVC volumes between the sexes; Figure 1A) showed the least prominent sex differences in the HVC transcriptomes across all the comparisons performed in this study. Nevertheless, the extent of sex differences in gene expression levels was extensive (> 1,300 sex-biased genes, Figure 2A, comparison 1). The comparison showing the second-lowest degree of sex-differences was the comparison of nonbreeding male and nonbreeding female canaries (> 1,500 sex-biased genes, Figure 2A, comparison 7), both lacking singing behaviour, but HVC volume was male biased (Figure 1A). Testosterone implantation induced singing behaviour and increased the HVC volume of both male and female canaries, although a markedly smaller

HVC volume continued to be observed in these females (Figure 1A and Supplementary Figure 1C). Such processes in females are referred to as "masculinization" of the female brain and behaviour (Arnold and Gorski, 1984; Wade, 2001). However, the gene expression levels of the testosterone-stimulated singing female canaries were very different from those of the male canaries administered the same treatment (> 5,000 sex-biased genes, Figure 2A, comparison 4). The comparisons showing the most striking sex differences were the two that included spontaneously singing female canaries. As revealed in these comparisons, many genes showed markedly different regulation in spontaneously singing female canaries, as reflected by expression levels, compared with breeding singing male canaries (> 8,600 sex-biased genes, comparison 5) and nonbreeding nonsinging male canaries (> 7,500 sex-biased genes, comparison 6, Figure 2A).



357 **Figure 2. Female- and male-biased sex differences in HVC gene expression levels in**
358 **songbirds.**

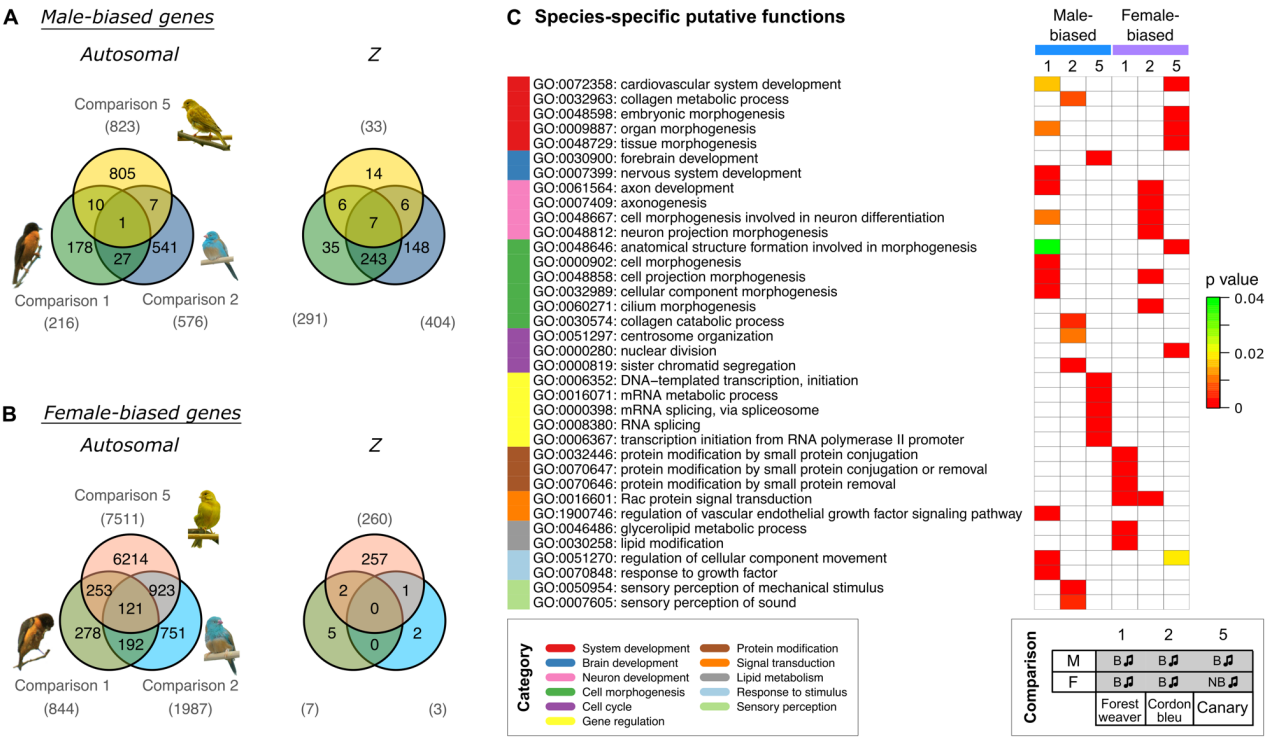
A, The bar graph summarizes the number of sex-biased genes in the HVC transcriptome identified from each male-to-female comparisons. The phenotypes of the groups being compared in each male-to-female comparison are listed at the bottom of the graph. **B,** The bar graph summarizes the number of autosomal and Z chromosomal genes classified as male- and female-biased genes in the HVC transcriptome based on each male-to-female comparison. Abbreviations: B, breeding; NB, nonbreeding; T, testosterone implantation. The music note indicates the presence or absence of singing behaviour; the asterisk (*) indicates enrichment for Z chromosomal genes (adjusted $p < 0.05$, Fisher's exact test followed by the Bonferroni correction for multiple testing).

359 For each comparison, we decomposed the sex-biased genes into two classes,
360 autosomal genes and Z sex chromosomal genes, to assess whether the sex-biased genes
361 were mainly concentrated on the sex chromosomes. Annotation for W chromosomal
362 genes was unfortunately not available in our study. We used Fisher's exact test to evaluate
363 whether a particular chromosome was enriched in sex-biased genes. We observed
364 enrichments of Z chromosomal genes among the male-biased genes identified in most of
365 the comparisons (Figure 2B and Supplementary Table 1). This observation was not
366 surprising because males are the homogametic sex (have two copies of Z), whereas
367 females are the heterogametic sex (have one copy of Z and one copy of W) in birds, and
368 the dosage compensation for Z-linked genes is less complete in birds than that in
369 mammals (Itoh et al., 2007; Mank, 2013; Nätt et al., 2014; Uebbing et al., 2015; Wolf and
370 Bryk, 2011). However, one canary comparison (breeding singing males and nonbreeding
371 singing females, Figure 2B, comparison 5) was an exception (Supplementary Table 1). In
372 this comparison, the spontaneously singing female canaries expressed a high number of
373 Z chromosomal genes (260 genes, approximately 24% of all Z chromosomal genes) at
374 higher levels than the breeding singing male canaries, which eliminated the male
375 enrichment of Z chromosomal genes.

376 Sex-biased genes were not only Z chromosomal genes; in fact, sizeable numbers
377 of the autosomal genes were found to be sex-biased genes, particularly female-biased
378 genes (male-biased genes: >40%; female-biased genes: >96%, Figure 2B). Many studies
379 have reported sex differences in the gene expression levels in multiple tissues and animal
380 species (Frésard et al., 2013; Itoh et al., 2007; Nätt et al., 2014; Uebbing et al., 2015; Wolf
381 and Bryk, 2011; Yang et al., 2006). Gene expression levels are generally under tight
382 regulation, and perturbed expression levels might result in functional consequences. For
383 example, several genes, including transcription factors, modulate distinct gene sets

384 depending on their expression levels (Birchler et al., 2001; Doghman et al., 2013; Schulz,
385 2017).

386 We compared the male-biased genes in a pairwise manner across the
387 comparisons and found that the male-biased autosomal genes showed low similarity to
388 each other (Supplementary Figure 5A), whereas the male-biased Z chromosomal genes
389 showed some similarity across the groups (Supplementary Figure 5B). Pairwise
390 comparison of the female-biased genes across groups showed low similarity, and this
391 finding was obtained for both autosomal genes (Supplementary Figure 5C) and Z
392 chromosomal genes (Supplementary Figure 5D). Fisher's exact test showed that
393 chromosome 2 (comparisons 1, 4, and, 5) and chromosome 3 (comparisons 1, 2, and 4)
394 are hotspots for female-biased genes; the enrichments of these chromosomes were
395 observed in four out of the seven pairwise comparisons (Supplementary Table 1).



396

397 **Figure 3. Cross-species comparisons of sex-biased genes expressed in the HVC of**
398 **birds with singing phenotypes shows high species specificity.**

Venn diagrams of male-biased (**A**) and female-biased (**B**) autosomal and Z chromosomal genes. The numbers of sex-biased genes are indicated in parentheses. **C,** GO term enrichment analysis predicting the biological functions of sex-biased (autosomal and Z chromosomal) genes. The GO terms were categorized and are colour coded. Bonferroni-adjusted P values are shown by colour scales in the heatmap. Only five GO terms with the lowest Bonferroni-adjusted P values are shown for each set (see Supplementary Table 2 for the complete results). The phenotypes of the groups used for comparisons 1,

2, and 5 are listed at the bottom. Abbreviations: B, breeding; NB, nonbreeding. The music note indicates the presence or absence of singing behaviour

399 Further examination of the sex-biased genes (comparisons 1, 2, and 5) identified
400 in the groups of naturally singing birds revealed that almost none of the male-biased
401 autosomal genes (Figure 3A) and none of the female-biased Z chromosomal genes (Figure
402 3B) were shared across the three songbird species. In addition, relatively low numbers of
403 male-biased Z chromosomal genes (Figure 3A) and female-biased autosomal genes
404 (Figure 3B) were shared across the three songbird species. This observation indicates
405 that only a small set of genes were regulated in the same manner (male- or female-biased)
406 between species even though all birds exhibit singing behaviours. Moreover, a Gene
407 Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis suggested that male- and female-biased genes did not
408 functionally converge to similar pathways in the three studied species (Figure 3C).

409 **The plasma androgen levels substantially alter the HVC transcriptomes of canaries**

410 With the aim of understanding the features that distinguish the HVC transcriptomes in
411 within-species contexts, we performed a principal component analysis (PCA) of the HVC
412 transcriptomic data from the seven canary groups to identify variables that would explain
413 the most variation in the data. By calculating the correlation coefficient between the PCs
414 and the variables (plasma testosterone levels (Supplementary Figure 1), HVC volume
415 (Figure 1A), sex, and singing), we identified the variables that were highly correlated with
416 the most important PCs. PC1 explained 32% of the data variance (Figure 1C and
417 Supplementary Figure 6) and was strongly correlated with the blood plasma androgen
418 concentrations and the presence of singing activity (plasma androgen level: Pearson's r =
419 -0.57, Bonferroni-adjusted $p = 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$; singing: Pearson's r = -0.51, Bonferroni-adjusted
420 p = 0.001, Supplementary Table 3). Sex and HVC volume were strongly correlated with
421 PC2 (sex: Pearson's r = -0.91, Bonferroni-adjusted $p = 4.4 \times 10^{-16}$; HVC volume: Pearson's
422 r = -0.73, Bonferroni-adjusted $p = 2.1 \times 10^{-7}$), which explained 19% of the variance in the
423 data (Supplementary Table 3). Taken together, the hierarchical clustering and PCA results
424 suggest that although phylogenetic relationships dominate the variation between
425 songbird species, the circulating testosterone levels, the presence of singing activity, and
426 sex identity dominate the HVC gene expression patterns within a single species.

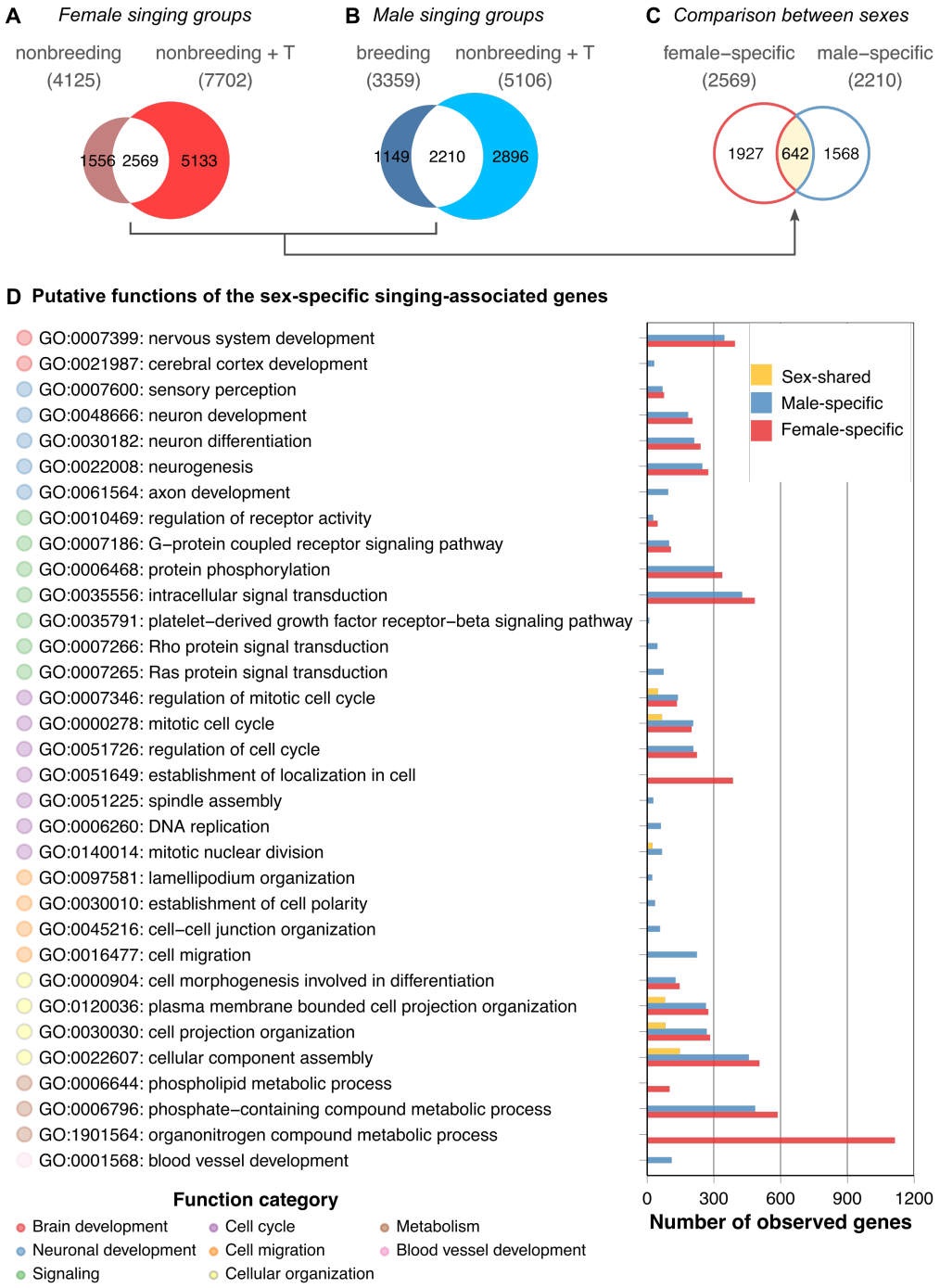
427 **The application of testosterone does not yield an HVC transcriptome that mimics**
428 **that of natural singing canaries**

429 To investigate the molecular mechanisms underlying the singing phenotype, we
430 performed a differential gene expression analysis of the HVC transcriptomes of the two
431 groups of singing canary females (nonbreeding spontaneously singing females and
432 nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing females) against the nonsinging
433 nonbreeding female canaries. Similarly, a differential gene expression analysis of the HVC
434 transcriptomes of the two groups of singing male canaries (breeding singing males and
435 nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing males) with nonsinging nonbreeding male
436 canaries was performed. A substantial number of genes were differentially expressed
437 between singing and nonsinging birds (Figure 4A, nonbreeding singing females: 4,125
438 genes; nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing females: 7,702 genes; breeding
439 singing males: 3,359 genes; nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing males: 5,106
440 genes). Approximately 65% of the differentially expressed genes found in the naturally
441 singing birds overlapped with those found in the testosterone-treated birds of the same
442 sex (male: 65%; female: 62%). However, both testosterone-treated groups had markedly
443 higher numbers of differentially expressed genes than the naturally singing groups of the
444 same sex (Figure 4A). Thus, although testosterone implantation induced singing in
445 females and males, most testosterone-responsive genes (female: 67%; male: 57%) might
446 not be necessary for singing behaviour *per se* but rather a response to nonphysiological
447 levels of testosterone (Supplementary Figure 1). Alternatively, mechanisms that lead to
448 the first song in life might be very different from those that reinduce singing in animals
449 that sang before (Vellema et al., 2019a). Because male canaries sing regularly starting
450 from approximately 50 days of age (Nottebohm et al., 1986) while most female canaries
451 never sing (Ko et al., 2020), the induction of singing in females by testosterone likely
452 activated genes related to first-time singing, whereas in males, this treatment activated
453 genes related to reinduced singing.

454 **The majority of differentially expressed genes between singing and nonsinging**
455 **canaries are sex-specific**

456 We examined whether the overlapping gene sets of the female canary signing groups
457 were similar to the overlapping gene sets of the singing males (Figure 4C). The Venn
458 diagram indicated that only approximately 25% (642 of 2569 genes, Supplementary
459 Table 4) of the female-specific expressed genes and 29% (642 of 2210 genes,

460 Supplementary Table 5) of the male-specific expressed genes were shared by both sexes
461 of singing canaries (Supplementary Table 6).



462

463 **Figure 4. HVC transcriptomes of naturally singing canaries are dissimilar from**
464 **testosterone-stimulated singing canaries.**

Venn diagrams comparing (**A**) the two female singing groups, (**B**) the two male singing groups, and (**C**) the female- and male-specific expressed genes resulting from comparisons A and B. Note that only approximately 20% of the genes were shared among the singing females and approximately 26% were shared among the singing males. The majority of these overlapping genes were not sex-shared;

approximately 75% of female intersections were specific to female groups, whereas 71% of male intersections were specific to male groups. **D**, GO term enrichment analysis of female-specific, male-specific, and sex-shared expressed genes derived from comparisons A to C. Because many putative functions show similarities between male- and female-specific expressed genes, the results suggest functional intraspecies convergence based on sex-specific gene expression in the HVC. See Supplementary Table 7 for the full results of the GO term enrichment analysis.

465 **The sex-specific genes show functional overlap**

466 To understand the putative biological functions of the female-specific, male-specific, and
467 sex-shared expressed genes in the HVC, we performed a GO term enrichment analysis.
468 Interestingly, the results suggested that the female- and male-specific expressed genes
469 largely overlapped at the functional level (Figure 4D and Supplementary Table 7). GO
470 terms such as nervous system development (GO:0007399), neuron development
471 (GO:0048666), and intracellular signal transduction (GO:0035556) were shared among
472 the sexes. Female-specific GO terms were mainly related to cellular maintenance, such as
473 organonitrogen compound metabolic process (GO:1901564) and phospholipid metabolic
474 process (GO:0006644). In contrast, the male-specific GO terms were axon development
475 (GO:0061564), DNA replication (GO:0006260), cell migration (GO:0016477), and blood
476 vessel development (GO:0001568). In summary, although only approximately one-fourth
477 to one-third of the sex-specific expressed genes are shared among the sexes in terms of
478 their identities, most of the predicted functions of the sex-specific expressed genes are
479 nevertheless sex-shared in singing canaries.

480 All four groups of singing canaries had elevated plasma androgen levels compared
481 with nonbreeding nonsinging canaries of the same sex (Supplementary Figure 1 and (Ko
482 et al., 2020)). The activation of singing is likely testosterone-dependent in females as in
483 males (Hartley and Suthers, 1989; Heid et al., 1985; Leitner et al., 2001a; Nottebohm et
484 al., 1987). Thus, the potential master regulator for inducing singing behaviour might be
485 testosterone-sensitive and Z-linked. One such candidate is *DMRT1* (doublesex and mab-3
486 related transcription factor 1), which is present in the sex-shared expressed gene list. The
487 Z-linked gene *DMRT1* is needed for male sex determination in birds and other animal
488 species (Herpin and Schartl, 2015; Lambeth et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). The
489 overexpression of *DMRT1* in female chicken embryos reduces aromatase expression in
490 the gonads and triggers development of the testis (Lambeth et al., 2014). The role of
491 DMRT1 in adult avian tissues in general and in the brain in particular is unknown. Thus,
492 whether DMRT1 affects steroid metabolism in the HVC, such as converting testosterone
493 to more active metabolites (see below), or whether it regulates other mechanisms that

494 direct the HVC into a configuration that enables singing needs to be validated by future
495 experiments.

496 Testosterone can be converted to 5α-dihydrotestosterone (5α-DHT) and 17β-
497 estradiol, which activate androgen receptor (AR) and estrogen receptors (ERα and ERβ),
498 respectively. Both AR (encoded by *AR*) and ERs (ERα encoded by *ESR1* and ERβ encoded
499 by *ESR2*) are transcription factors that play important roles in the transcription of
500 numerous genes (Bourdeau et al., 2004; Pihlajamaa et al., 2015; Takayama et al., 2007;
501 Wilson et al., 2016). Interestingly, *ESR1* was specifically expressed in males, whereas
502 *ESR2* was female-specifically expressed in the HVC of canaries, which suggests that
503 estrogen receptor paralogues could provide finer-tuned mechanisms for sex-specific
504 regulation. Empirical results have shown that ERα and ERβ bind to the same estrogen
505 response element motifs (Zhao et al., 2010) and might functionally overlap in some
506 tissues. Moreover, ER paralogues show sex differences in expression levels and tissue
507 specificity (Zhang et al., 2017). In quail, the administration of an agonist specific to ERβ
508 on embryonic day 7 demasculinizes male sexual behaviour and midbrain nuclei
509 characteristics in Japanese quails, whereas an agonist specific to ERα does not exert this
510 effect (Court et al., 2020). The specific roles of each ER paralogue in the adult HVC of male
511 and female songbirds warrant further investigation. Until now, ERα but not ERβ was
512 expected to regulate the function of HVC neurons of adult songbirds in addition to the AR
513 (Frankl-Vilches and Gahr, 2017).

514 Conclusion

515 In this study, we investigated the sex differences in the gene expression patterns in the
516 HVC of three songbird species with different levels of sex-specific singing and several
517 different song-related phenotypes between male and female canaries. Our inter- and
518 intraspecies comparisons yielded large-scale transcriptional sex differences regardless of
519 singing behaviour. Instead, fundamental sex differences in gene expression levels were
520 found in the HVC, and these differences were highly species-specific. By leveraging
521 several experimental groups of canaries, we found that the plasma androgen levels and
522 sex were the major contributors to the variations in the HVC transcriptome. Although
523 testosterone reliably induced singing in both female and male canaries, testosterone
524 treatment did not alter the transcriptome to imitate that of natural singing birds. Our
525 results suggest that female and male canaries rely on different gene networks for singing
526 behaviour, but the sex-specific gene networks might show functional convergence.

527 ## Data accessibility

528 The microarray CEL files (GEO Series accession number GSE83674) are available on
529 NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus. The processed microarray data, plasma androgen
530 levels, HVC volume measures, and all scripts used for analysis and visualization are
531 available in GitHub (https://github.com/maggieMCKO/SongbirdSexDiff).

532 ## Authors' contributions

533 M-CK collected the nonbreeding testosterone-implanted canaries, analysed and
534 visualized the transcriptomic data and was a major contributor to the writing of the
535 manuscript. AB and M-CK performed the RNA extractions and microarray hybridizations.
536 MG and M-CK isolated the tissues for microarray. MG collected the forest weavers and
537 cordon-bleus. MG conceived the study and obtained financial support for the study. M-CK,
538 CF-V and MG drafted the manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final
539 manuscript.

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551 ## Competing interests

552 The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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833 # Tables

834 **Table 1. Experimental groups and sample sizes.**

Species	Group	Sex	Singing	Tissue	Sample size
Forest weaver	Breeding	Female	Yes	HVC	6
		Male	Yes	HVC	6
Blue-capped cordon-bleu	Breeding	Female	Yes	HVC	6
		Male	Yes	HVC	6
Canary	Breeding	Female	No	HVC	6
		Male	Yes	HVC	6
	Nonbreeding	Female	Yes	HVC	6
		Female	No	HVC	5
		Male	No	HVC	6
	Nonbreeding + testosterone	Female	Yes	HVC	6
		Male	Yes	HVC	6

835

836 **Supplementary Table 1. Fisher's exact tests of sex-biased genes for chromosome**
837 **enrichment.**

838 **Supplementary Table 2. GO term enrichment analysis of sex-biased genes**
839 **identified from the forest weaver (comparison 1), cordon-bleu (comparison 2), and**
840 **canary (comparison 5) comparisons.**

Abbreviations: FWm, forest weaver male-biased genes; CBm, cordon-bleu male-biased genes; Cm, canary male-biased genes; FWf, forest weaver female-biased genes; CBm, cordon-bleu female-biased genes; CfS, canary female-biased genes.

841 **Supplementary Table 3. Pearson's correlation analysis of principal components**
842 **and variables (plasma androgen levels, HVC volume, sex, and singing).**

843 **Supplementary Table 4. Female-specific expressed genes.**

Abbreviations: SDfS: nonbreeding spontaneously singing female canaries; SDfT: nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing female canaries.

844 **Supplementary Table 5. Male-specific expressed genes.**

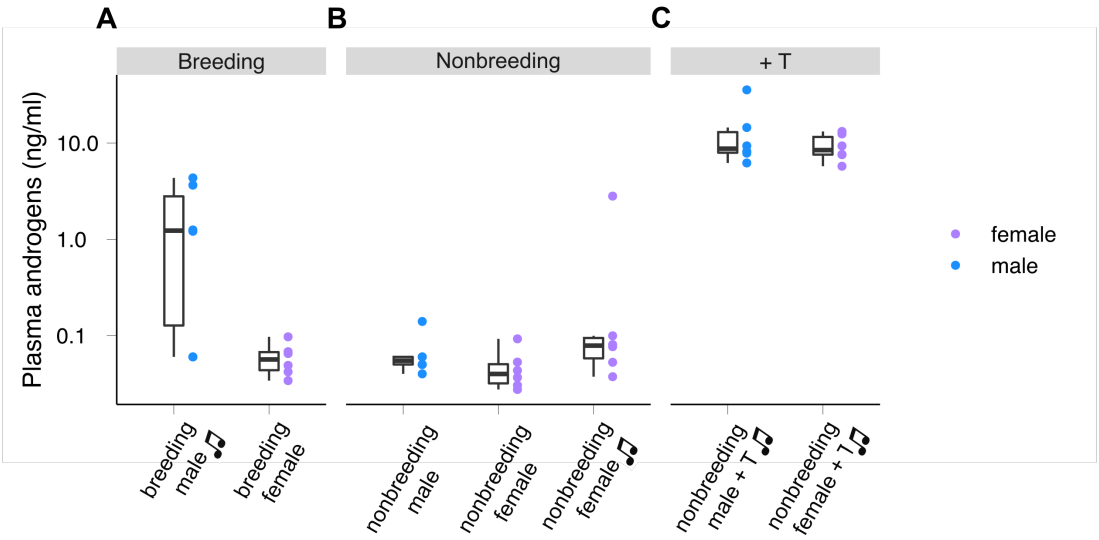
Abbreviations: LDm: breeding singing male canaries; SDmT: nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing male canaries.

845 **Supplementary Table 6. Sex-shared expressed genes.**

Abbreviations: LDm: breeding singing male canaries; SDfS: nonbreeding spontaneously singing female canaries; SDmT: nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing male canaries; SDfT: nonbreeding testosterone-stimulated singing female canaries.

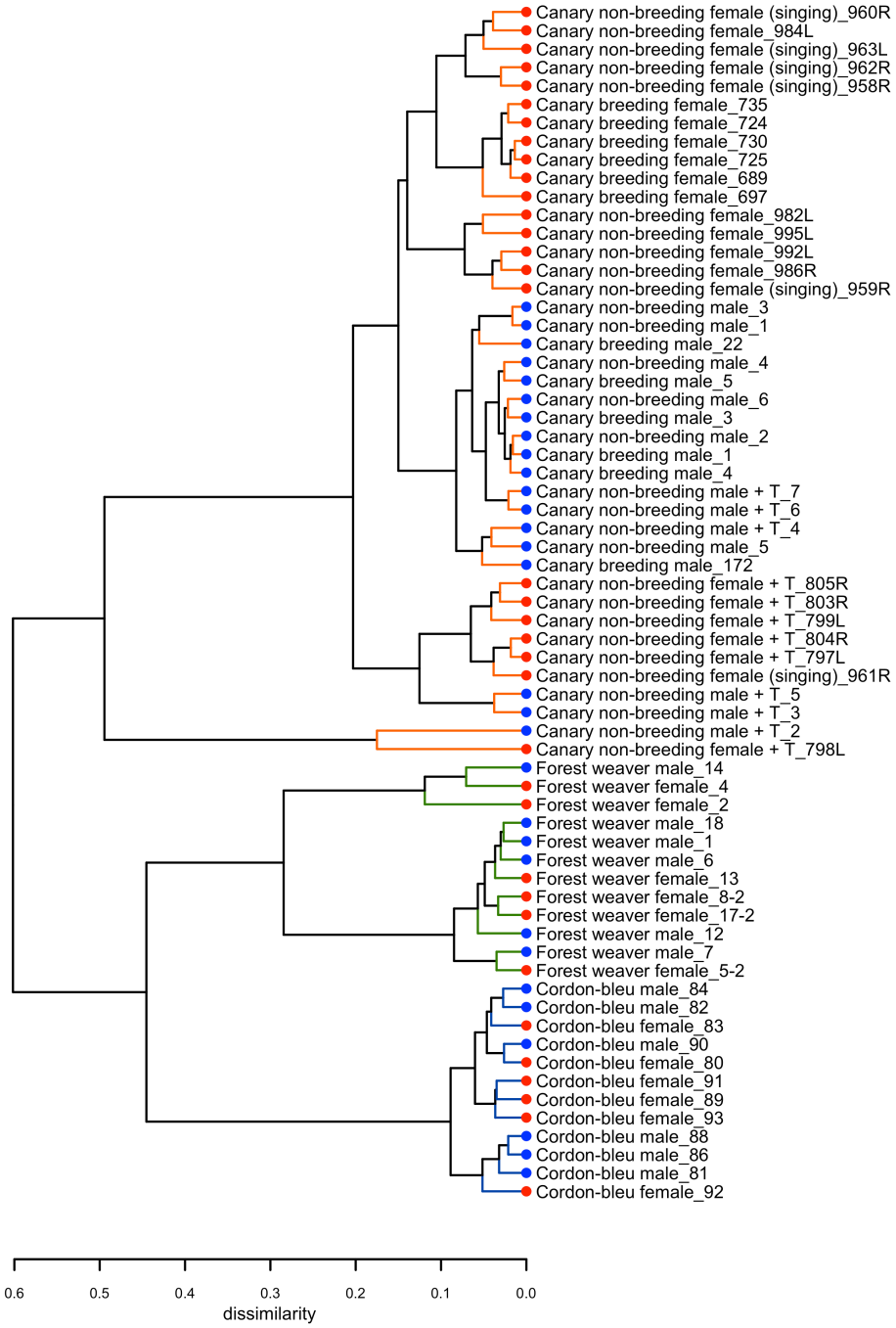
846 **Supplementary Table 7. GO term enrichment analysis of female-specific, male-**
847 **specific and sex-shared genes.**
848

Supplementary Figures



Supplementary Figure 1. Plasma androgen levels of seven groups of canaries on the day of sacrifice.

A, Canaries in breeding conditions. Singing males 1.76 ng/ml (mean), nonsinging females 59.2 pg/ml. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 6, P value = 0.07. **B,** Canaries in nonbreeding conditions. Nonsinging males 66.7 pg/ml (mean), nonsinging females 47.2 pg/ml, singing females 52.6 pg/ml. Mann-Whitney Test (nonsinging males vs. nonsinging females), U = 9, P value = 0.172. Mann-Whitney Test (nonsinging males vs. singing females), U = 24, P value = 0.377. **C,** Testosterone-implanted nonbreeding canaries. Males 13.5 ng/ml, females 9.31 ng/ml. Mann-Whitney Test, U = 13, P value = 0.485. Testosterone implantation significantly increased the plasma androgen levels of both nonbreeding males and females Mann-Whitney Test (nonbreeding nonsinging males vs. testosterone-implanted singing males), U = 0, P value = 0.00492. Mann-Whitney Test (nonbreeding nonsinging females vs. testosterone-implanted singing females), U = 0, P value = 0.00217. The plasma androgen levels were higher in the breeding males than in the nonbreeding nonsinging males (Mann-Whitney Test, U = 32, P value = 0.0275). The boxes indicate the 25th/50th/75th percentiles (bottom/middle/top bar), and the extent of the whiskers indicates the most extreme values that are within 1.5 times the IQR (interquartile range) of the hinge. Each colour-coded dot indicates the measurement from one bird. The nonbreeding singing female canaries data were obtained from (Ko et al., 2020).

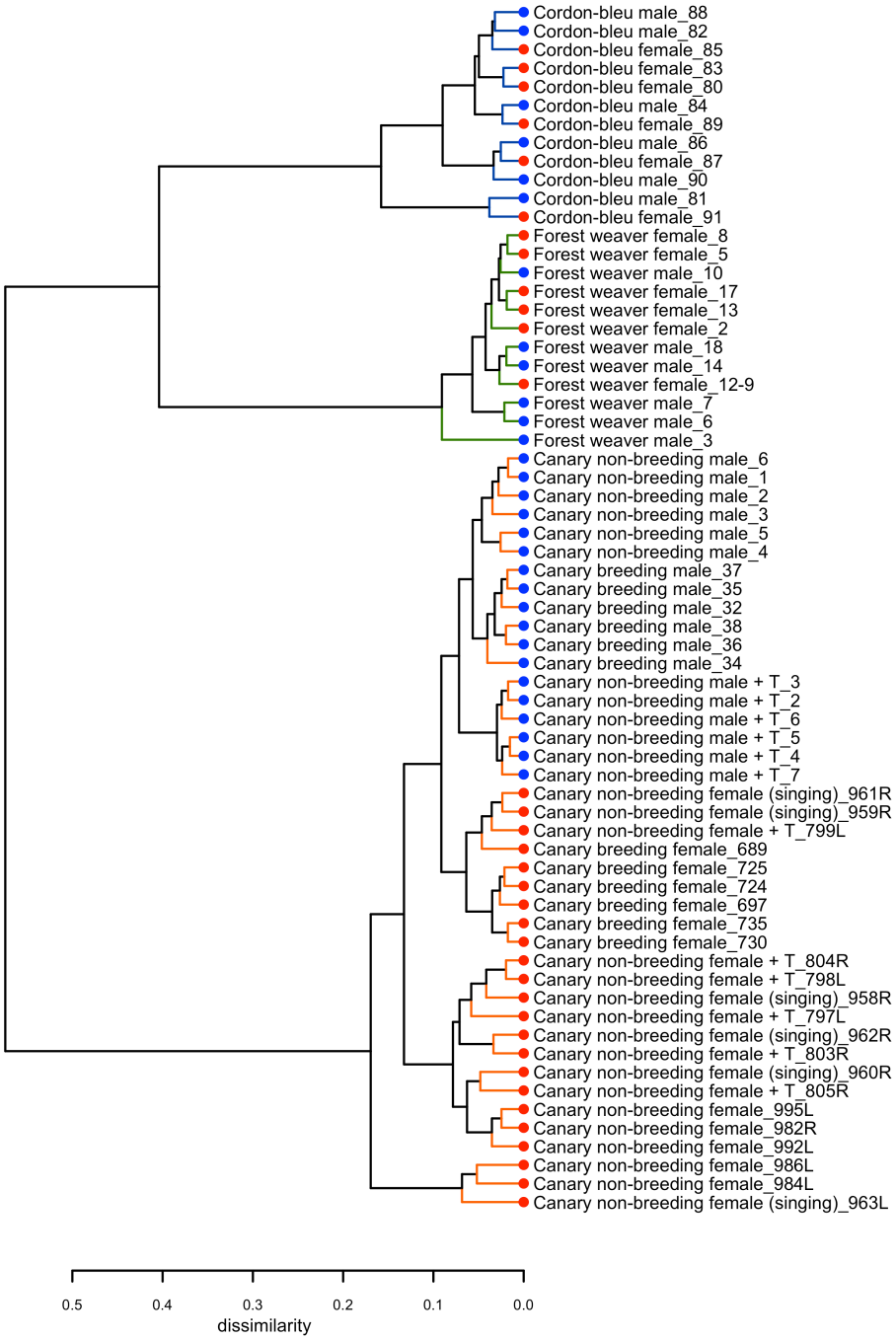


854

855 **Supplementary Figure 2. Hierarchical clustering of the HVC transcriptomes of 65**

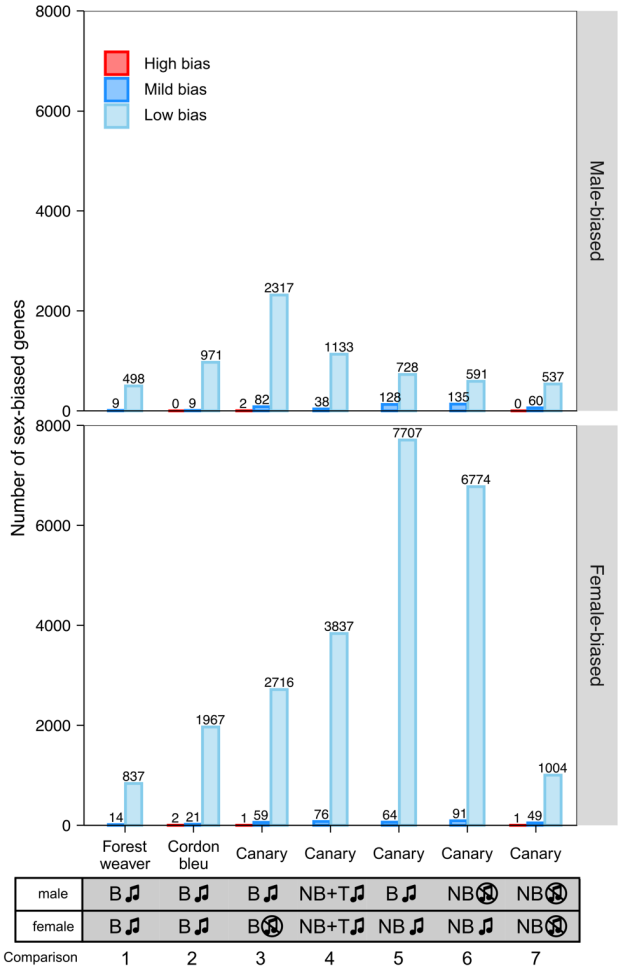
856 **birds used in this study.**

Hierarchical clustering showed that the HVC transcriptomes were first clustered based on the phylogenetic relationship; among canaries, nonbreeding females implanted with testosterone showed the most distinctive patterns. +T: testosterone implantation.

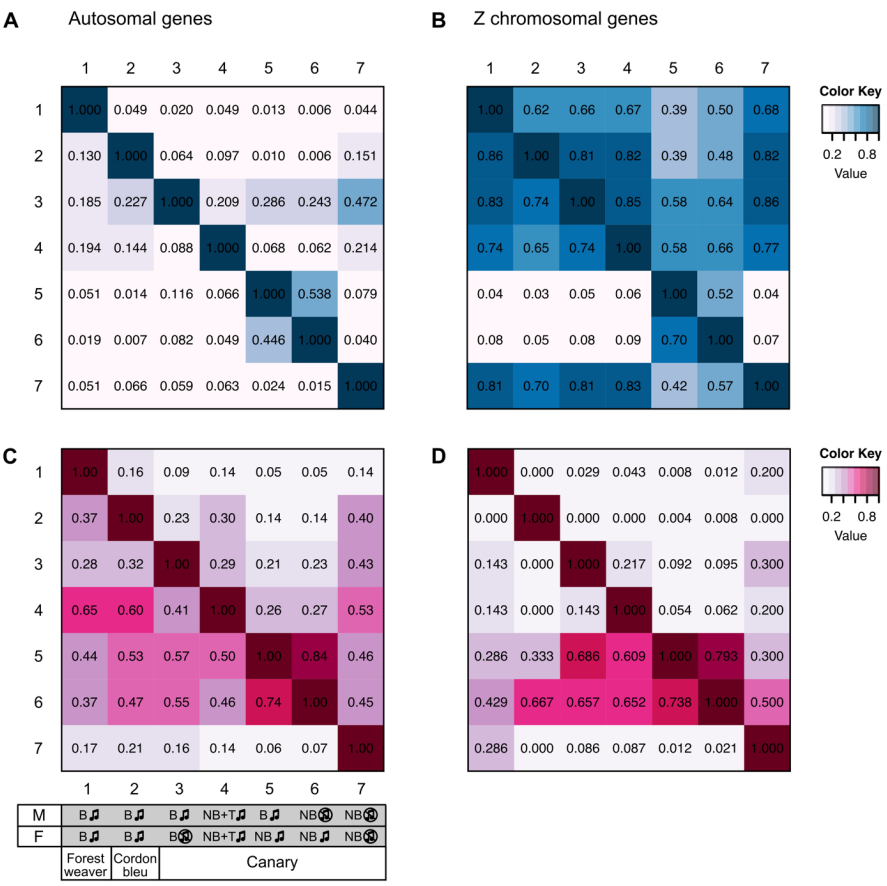


Supplementary Figure 3. Hierarchical clustering of the entopallium transcriptomes of 65 birds used in this study.

Hierarchical clustering showed that the entopallium transcriptomes were first clustered based on the phylogenetic relationship. The canaries were clustered by sex. +T: testosterone implantation.

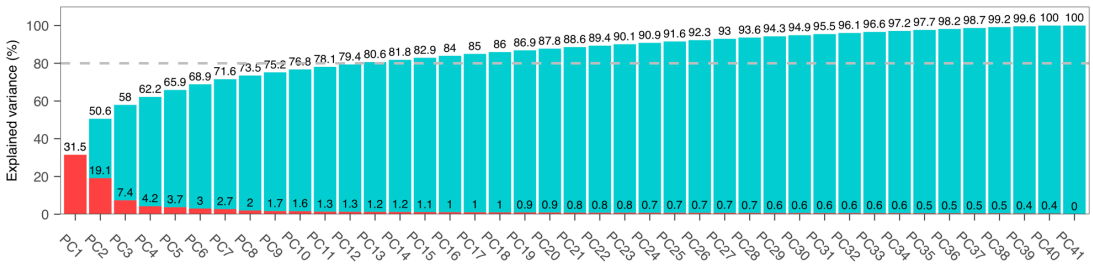


Supplementary Figure 4. The majority of sex-biased genes showed low sex bias. The bar graph summarizes the number of sex-biased genes in the HVC transcriptome identified from each male-to-female comparison. High bias: $|\log_2(\text{fold change})| \geq 2$; moderate bias: $1 \leq |\log_2(\text{fold change})| < 2$; low bias: $0.5 \leq |\log_2(\text{fold change})| < 1$. The phenotypes of the groups being compared in each male-to-female comparison are listed at the bottom of the graph.

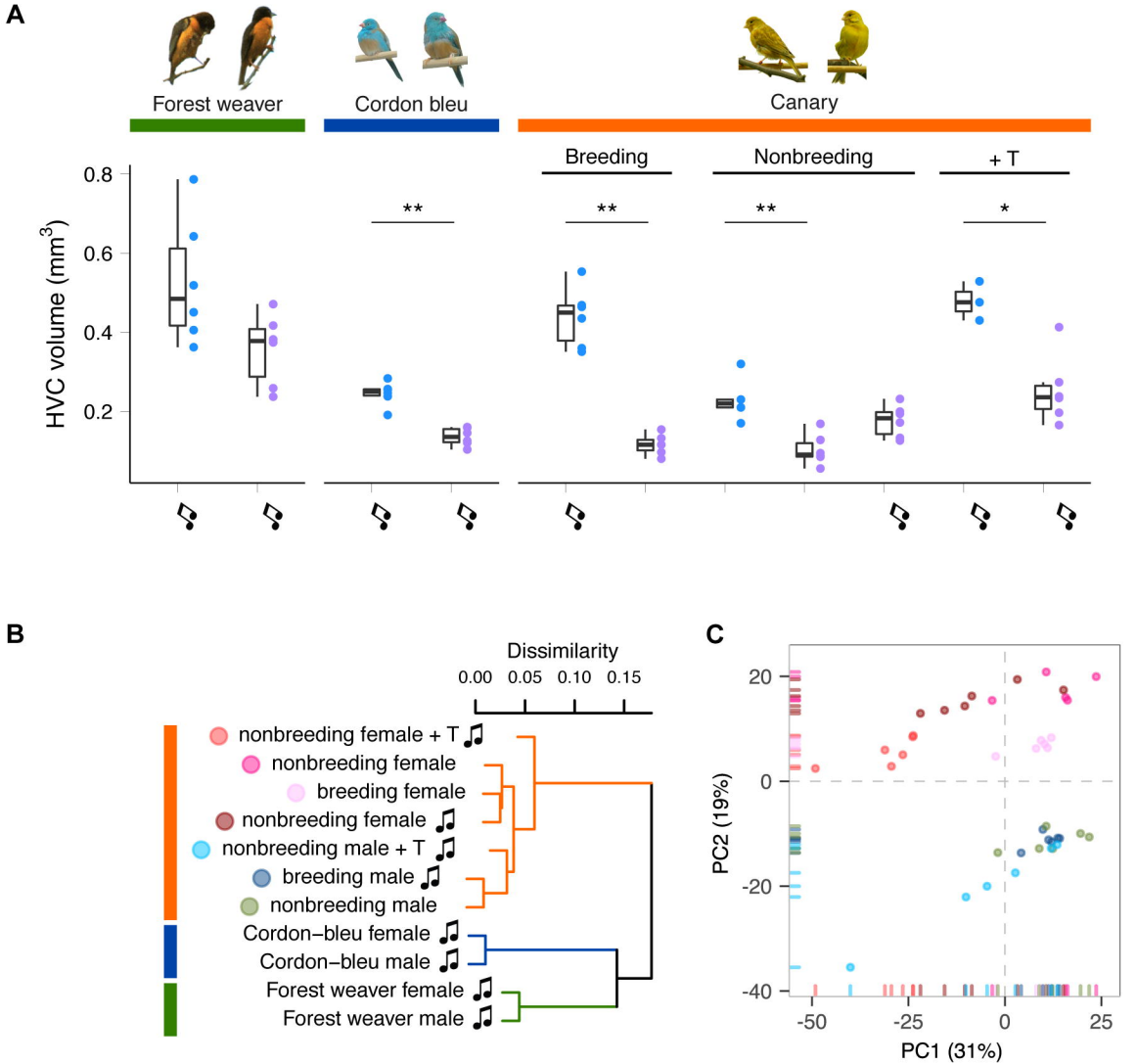


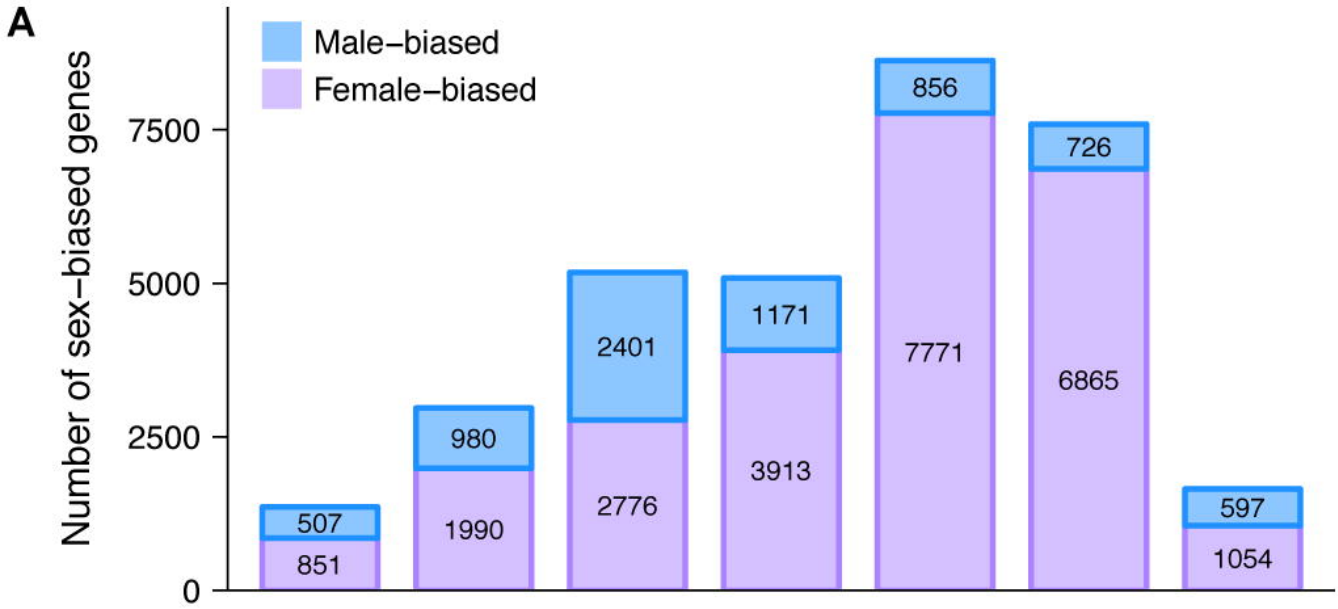
Supplementary Figure 5. Pairwise comparisons between autosomal and Z chromosomal sex-biased genes.

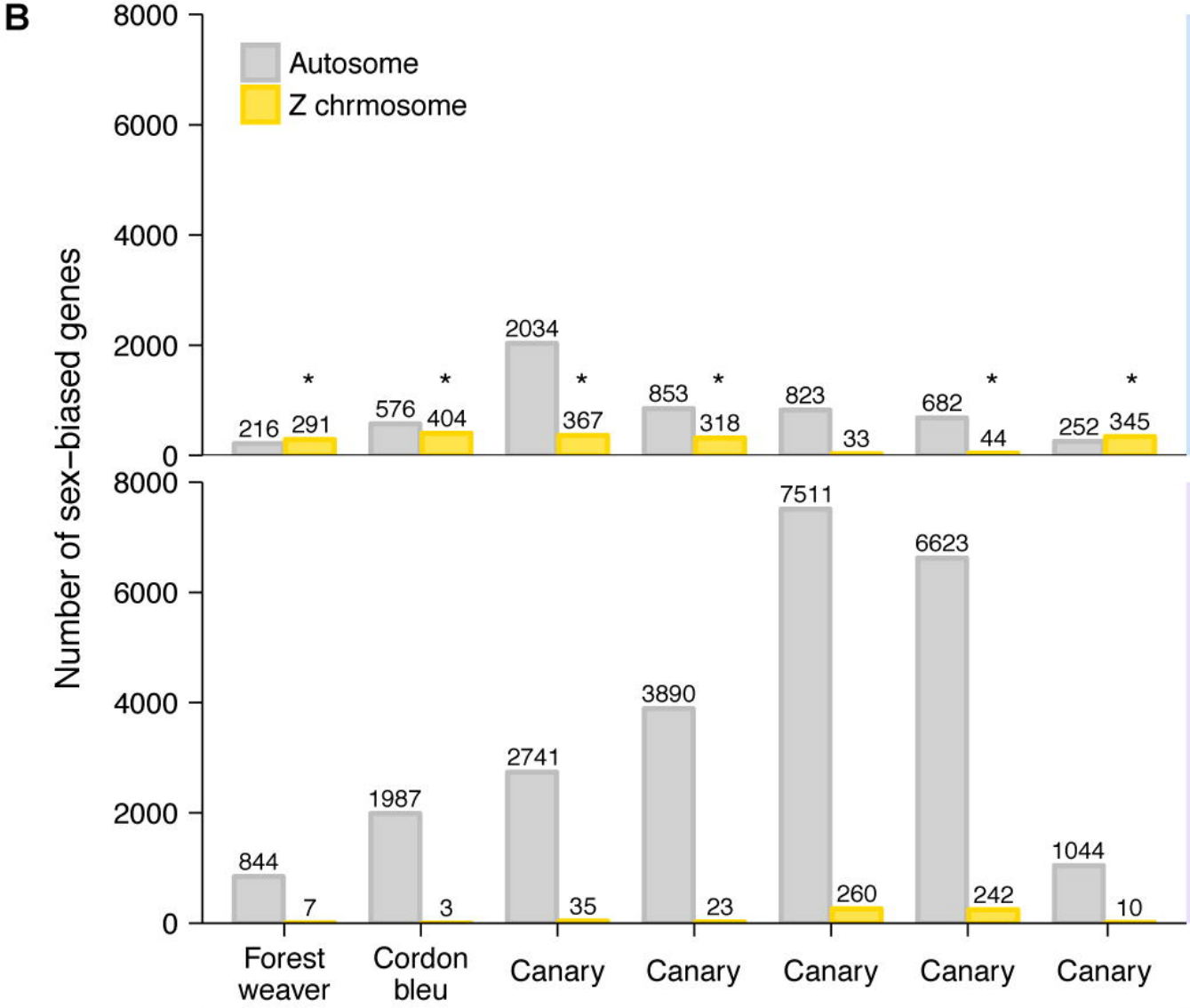
A, Autosomal male-biased genes. **B,** Z chromosomal male-biased genes. **C,** Autosomal female-biased genes. **D,** Z chromosomal female-biased genes. The numbers indicated in the matrices are the proportions of identical genes identified from each pair. The phenotypes of the groups used for each comparison are listed at the bottom. B: breeding; NB: nonbreeding; T: testosterone implantation; the music note indicates the presence or absence of singing behaviour.

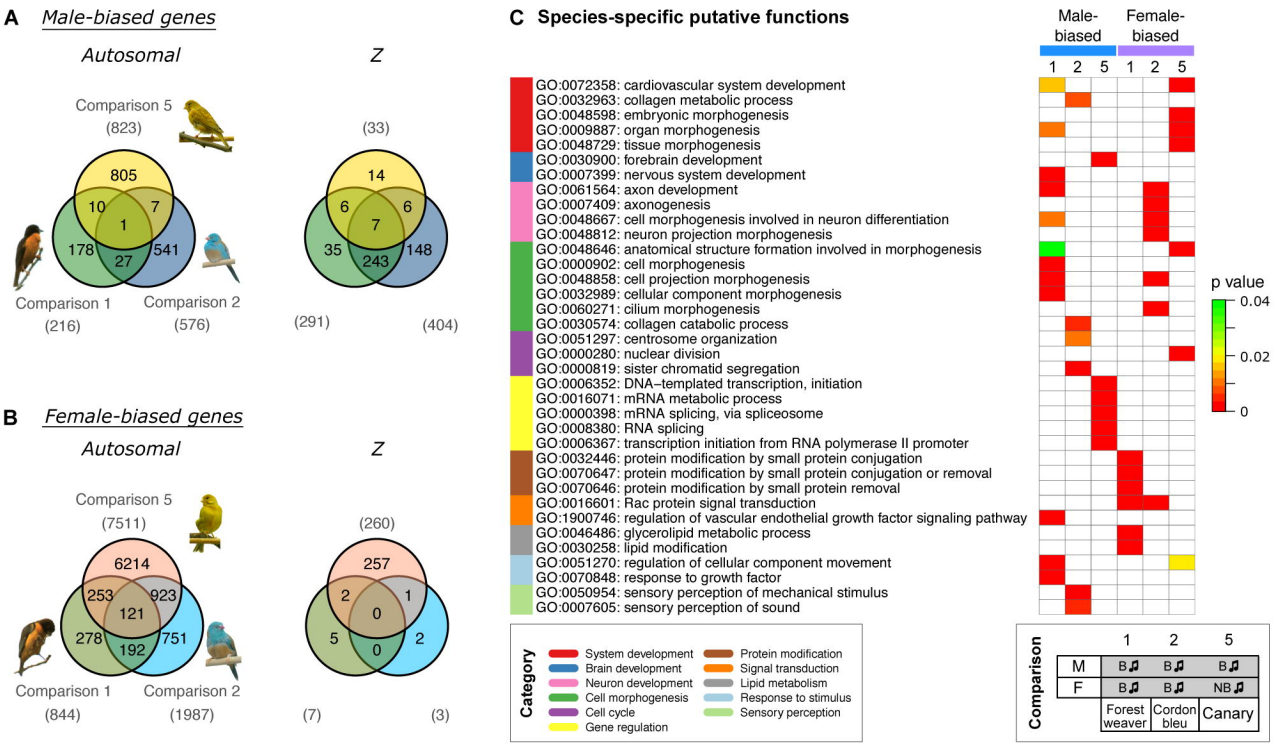


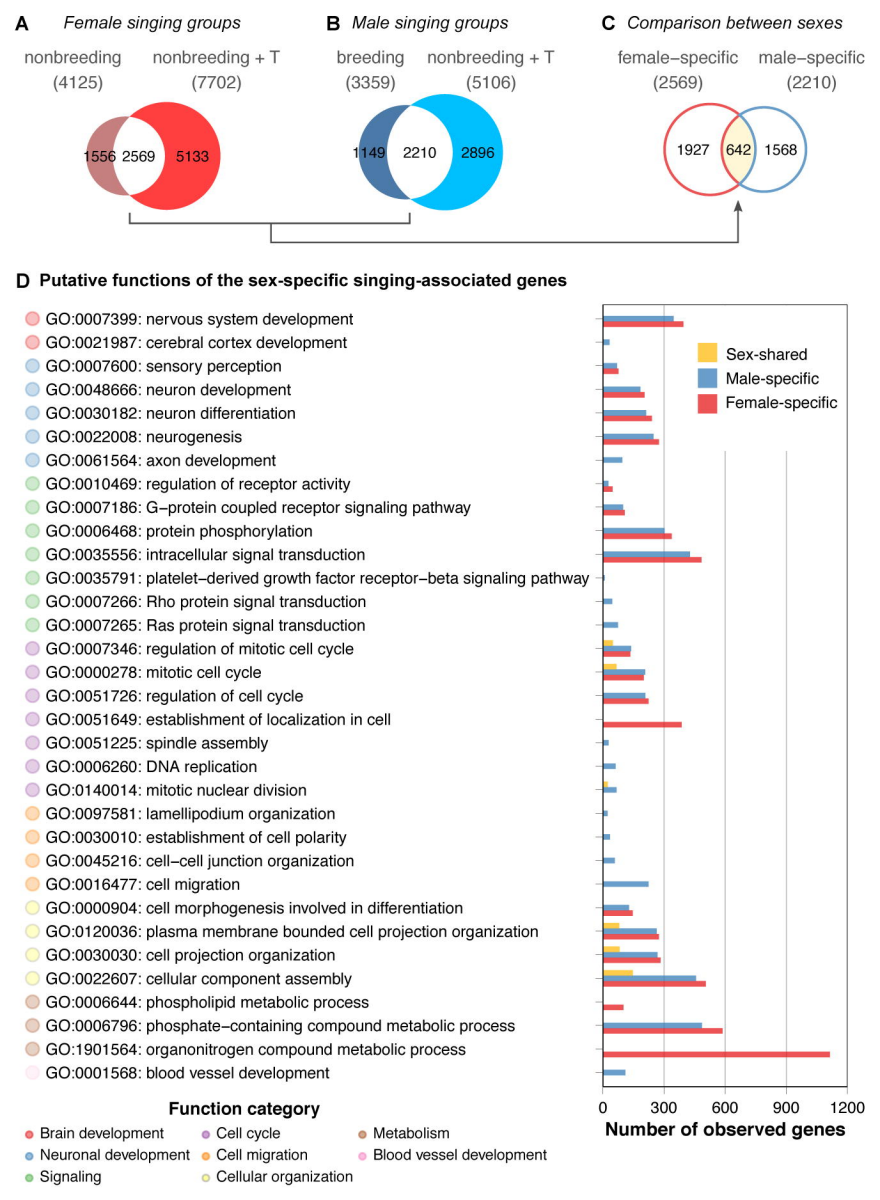
Supplementary Figure 6. PCA scree plot showing the percentage of variance explained by each principal component.


A
Forest weaver
Cordon bleu
Canary
Breeding
Nonbreeding
+ T
HVC volume (mm3)
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
**
**
**
*
B
Dissimilarity
0.00
0.05
0.10
0.15
nonbreeding female + T
nonbreeding female
breeding female
nonbreeding female
nonbreeding male + T
breeding male
nonbreeding male
Cordon–bleu female
Cordon–bleu male
Forest weaver female
Forest weaver male
C
PC2 (19%)
20
0
-20
-40
-50
-25
0
25
PC1 (31%)


A
Male−biased
Female−biased
Number of sex−biased genes
0
2500
5000
7500
507
851
980
1990
2401
2776
1171
3913
856
7771
726
6865
597
1054


B
Autosome
Z chrmosome
Male-biased genes
Female-biased genes
Number of sex−biased genes
0
2000
4000
6000
8000
216
291
576
404
2034
367
853
318
823
33
682
44
252
345
844
7
1987
3
2741
35
3890
23
7511
260
6623
242
1044
10
Forest weaver
Cordon bleu
Canary
Canary
Canary
Canary
Canary
male
B
B
B
NB + T
B
NB
NB
female
B
B
B
NB + T
NB
NB
NB


A
Male-biased genes
Autosomal
Z
Comparison 5
(823)
805
10
7
1
178
541
27
Comparison 1
(216)
Comparison 2
(576)
(33)
14
6
6
7
35
148
243
(291)
(404)
B
Female-biased genes
Autosomal
Z
Comparison 5
(7511)
6214
253
923
121
278
751
192
Comparison 1
(844)
Comparison 2
(1987)
(260)
257
2
1
0
5
2
0
(7)
(3)
C
Species-specific putative functions
Male-biased
Female-biased
1 2 5 1 2 5
GO:0072358: cardiovascular system development
GO:0032963: collagen metabolic process
GO:0048598: embryonic morphogenesis
GO:0009887: organ morphogenesis
GO:0048729: tissue morphogenesis
GO:0030900: forebrain development
GO:0007399: nervous system development
GO:0061564: axon development
GO:0007409: axonogenesis
GO:0048667: cell morphogenesis involved in neuron differentiation
GO:0048812: neuron projection morphogenesis
GO:0048646: anatomical structure formation involved in morphogenesis
GO:0000902: cell morphogenesis
GO:0048858: cell projection morphogenesis
GO:0032989: cellular component morphogenesis
GO:0060271: cilium morphogenesis
GO:0030574: collagen catabolic process
GO:0051297: centrosome organization
GO:0000280: nuclear division
GO:0000819: sister chromatid segregation
GO:0006352: DNA–templated transcription, initiation
GO:0016071: mRNA metabolic process
GO:0000398: mRNA splicing, via spliceosome
GO:0008380: RNA splicing
GO:0006367: transcription initiation from RNA polymerase II promoter
GO:0032446: protein modification by small protein conjugation
GO:0070647: protein modification by small protein conjugation or removal
GO:0070646: protein modification by small protein removal
GO:0016601: Rac protein signal transduction
GO:1900746: regulation of vascular endothelial growth factor signaling pathway
GO:0046486: glycerolipid metabolic process
GO:0030258: lipid modification
GO:0051270: regulation of cellular component movement
GO:0070848: response to growth factor
GO:0050954: sensory perception of mechanical stimulus
GO:0007605: sensory perception of sound
p value
0.04
0.02
0
Category
System development
Brain development
Neuron development
Cell morphogenesis
Cell cycle
Gene regulation
Protein modification
Signal transduction
Lipid metabolism
Response to stimulus
Sensory perception
Comparison
1 2 5
M B B B
F B B NB
Forest weaver
Cordon bleu
Canary


A Female singing groups
nonbreeding (4125)
nonbreeding + T (7702)
1556
2569
5133
B Male singing groups
breeding (3359)
nonbreeding + T (5106)
1149
2210
2896
C Comparison between sexes
female−specific (2569)
male−specific (2210)
1927
642
1568
D Putative functions of the sex-specific singing-associated genes
GO:0007399: nervous system development
GO:0021987: cerebral cortex development
GO:0007600: sensory perception
GO:0048666: neuron development
GO:0030182: neuron differentiation
GO:0022008: neurogenesis
GO:0061564: axon development
GO:0010469: regulation of receptor activity
GO:0007186: G−protein coupled receptor signaling pathway
GO:0006468: protein phosphorylation
GO:0035556: intracellular signal transduction
GO:0035791: platelet−derived growth factor receptor−beta signaling pathway
GO:0007266: Rho protein signal transduction
GO:0007265: Ras protein signal transduction
GO:0007346: regulation of mitotic cell cycle
GO:0000278: mitotic cell cycle
GO:0051726: regulation of cell cycle
GO:0051649: establishment of localization in cell
GO:0051225: spindle assembly
GO:0006260: DNA replication
GO:0140014: mitotic nuclear division
GO:0097581: lamellipodium organization
GO:0030010: establishment of cell polarity
GO:0045216: cell−cell junction organization
GO:0016477: cell migration
GO:0000904: cell morphogenesis involved in differentiation
GO:0120036: plasma membrane bounded cell projection organization
GO:0030030: cell projection organization
GO:0022607: cellular component assembly
GO:0006644: phospholipid metabolic process
GO:0006796: phosphate−containing compound metabolic process
GO:1901564: organonitrogen compound metabolic process
GO:0001568: blood vessel development
Sex-shared
Male-specific
Female-specific
0
300
600
900
1200
Number of observed genes
Function category
Brain development
Neuronal development
Signaling
Cell cycle
Cell migration
Cellular organization
Metabolism
Blood vessel development