2024 May 17

To the scientific editors of *Current Biology,*

Please consider our manuscript titled ‘Birds of a feather flock together: Light pollution’s effects differ by social context’ for submission to *Current Biology.* We present the first evidence of social regulation of circadian rhythms in vertebrates, using an integrative approach that links behavioral and molecular responses to light pollution in isolated and social settings. There is some evidence, across taxa, that social interactions could provide circadian rescue, we thought to test this amelioration to a pervasion environmental pollutant, light pollution. Opposite to our predictions, housing birds socially exacerbated responses to light pollution behaviorally and molecularly through advanced activity onset and disrupted core circadian genes in central and peripheral clock tissues. Moreover, hypothalamic gene expression predicted activity onset under light pollution, indicating synergist disruptions from biological organization to behavioral outputs.

Circadian rhythms are ubiquitous cross taxa, allowing organisms to synchronize their biological rhythms with the day-night cycle to align their behavioral, physiological, and molecular clocks (*1*). Artificial light at night disrupts circadian rhythms by affecting molecular, physiological, and behavioral processes, impacting health and biological functions across various organisms (*2*). Despite established research on light pollution’s disruptive effects, the possibility of social interactions to ameliorate circadian response has been largely ignored. Yet it is known that social interactions play a pivotal role in shaping behavioral rhythms (*3*).

Our findings demonstrate the profound influence of social interactions under light pollution. We analyzed birds exposed to light pollution compared to dark night controls in both isolated and socially housed conditions, measuring behavior, circulating concentrations of melatonin, and central and peripheral circadian gene expression in zebra finches. We found that artificial light at night advances activity onset and disrupts rhythmic circadian gene expression, all of which is exacerbated in social conditions. We also show light at night disrupts the peripheral clock in the liver in socially housed birds alone. These data broaden our understanding of social species’ responses to light pollution and is the first demonstration to our knowledge of social interactions regulating the circadian clock on a molecular level in vertebrates.

This research represents a novel, integrative approach to understanding complex responses to one of the most widespread and rapidly increasing pollutants, informing the fields of circadian biology, stress physiology, ecology, and social biology. Furthermore, results exemplify the value of accounting for social context to understand responses to environmental pollutants and stressors, which should interest the broad readership of *Current Biology*.

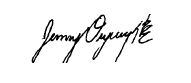
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Thank you for your time and consideration,

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**Works Cited**

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