

Title: Alarming birds and eavesdropping squirrels: Exploitation of public information in a natural system

Speaker: Keith Tarvin

Abstract:

Animals that live in social groups often give alarm calls that warn other members of their group of the presence of a predator. However, the information contained in an alarm call is available to anyone that can intercept it, raising the possibility that other individuals – of any species – may be able to exploit information directed toward toward other species. Although it may seem that every species should make use of such “heterospecific” alarm calls, there are actually costs associated with eavesdropping that mediate the benefits of exploiting public information. My talk will describe recent investigations by my students and me into the degree to which gray squirrels exploit information contained in the heterospecific alarm calls of birds.

Biography:

Keith Tarvin earned degrees at Hendrix College (BA), Univ. of Arkansas (MS) and Univ. of South Florida (PhD). He is currently Professor and Chair of Biology at Oberlin.

His research interests are in evolutionary and behavioral ecology, including signaling and communication, sexual and social selection, social evolution, and life history evolution. He studies the ways in which selection shapes social behavior, and his research and much of his teaching centers on this broad area of inquiry.