

# Lifestyle

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People parade during the Tropical Carnival on July, 7 2019 in Paris. — AFP

## Birds just wanna have fun: Like humans, cockatoos love to dance

**S**nowball, a sulphur-crested cockatoo, shot to YouTube stardom a decade ago for his uncanny ability to rock out to the Backstreet Boys. Now Snowball's back-alright! — having taught himself a dizzying array of new moves that might put you to shame, and have scientists excited about parrots' ability to process music and respond creatively. His rhythmic body-rolls, headbangs, shimmies, and many variations thereof were documented in a new paper published in *Current Biology* on Monday.



This handout from Irena Schulz at the Bird Lovers Only Rescue Service Inc shows Snowball the dancing cockatoo lifting a foot as he "dances" to music. — AFP

"This shows for the first time that another species truly dances to human music, spontaneously and without training, just based on its own development and social interaction with humans," senior author Aniruddh Patel, a psychologist at both Tufts and Harvard universities, told AFP. This isn't the first time Snowball has rendered his services for the noble pursuit of scientific discovery.

An earlier study by Patel in the same journal confirmed our feathered friend could groove to the beat-though at the time, his dancing was confined to head-bobbing and lifting his feet, actions long associated with courtship. Soon after, Snowball's owner Irena Schulz, who takes care of him at a bird sanctuary in Duncan, South Carolina, noticed he was making movements to music she hadn't seen before.

The development was all the more remarkable for the fact that she hadn't attempted to train him, save for providing some verbal encouragement with words like "Good Boy!" as she swayed back and forth and waved her hands. Had Snowball lifted his game to another level and taught himself some slick new moves? To answer this vital question, the scientists played him the 1980s classics "Another One Bites the Dust" and "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," each three times, for a total of 23 minutes.

The study's lead researcher, R. Joanne Jao Keehn, who is a cognitive neuroscientist as well as a classically and contemporarily trained dancer, then studied video footage frame-by-frame. She confirmed that he had indeed acquired a diverse repertoire of 14 distinct moves, and two combination moves. "Here, we're looking at highly complex movements, many of which are not part of natural parrot behavior," Patel told AFP, adding that this suggests cognitive planning of actions and the willingness to choose between alternatives to respond to a stimulus. "I wish I could dance like Snowball," he added.

### Social context

While the internet is replete with videos of parrots dancing, suggesting Snowball's abilities are far from unique, the ability is notably absent from primates, our closest genetic relatives, and our close companions dogs. What sets parrots apart might be their unique capacity for complex vocal learning, which is then paired with other advanced cognitive abilities and the tendency to form long-term social bonds, the paper said. Looking ahead, Patel and his colleagues are keen to explore this social context and determine if Snowball dances to strengthen his bond with people.

"When it comes to dancing, people don't just dance by themselves. They typically seek out other people and they act socially," said Patel. To find out whether that is also true of Snowball, they are carrying out new experiments in which he is either left alone with music and recorded on camera; has a human present who doesn't encourage him; or has a human present who encourages him and dances along. — AFP

## Egypt asks Interpol to trace Tutankhamun relic over ownership docs

**E**gypt has asked international police agency Interpol to track down a 3,000-year-old Tutankhamun artefact that was sold in London for \$6 million despite fierce opposition from Cairo, government officials said. Christie's auction house sold the 28.5-centimetre (11-inch) relic for £4,746,250 (\$5,970,000, 5,290,000 euros) to an unknown buyer in early July at one of its most controversial auctions in years. But less than a week after the sale, Egypt's National Committee for Antiquities Repatriation (NCAR) said after an urgent meeting that national prosecutors had asked Interpol "to issue a circular to trace" such artefacts over alleged missing paperwork.

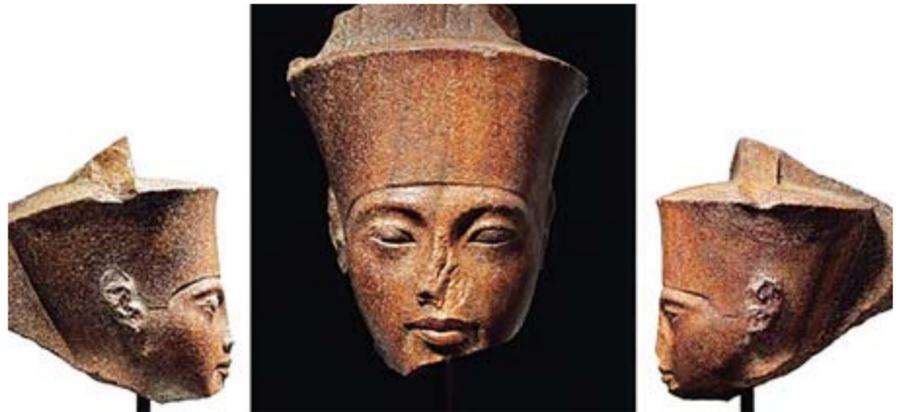
"The committee expresses its deep discontent of the unprofessional behaviour of the sale of Egyptian antiquities without providing the ownership documents and the evidences that prove its legal export from Egypt," the NCAR said in a statement. The committee-headed by Minister of Antiquities Khaled El-Enany and attended by his predecessor Zahi Hawass as well as officials from various ministries-also called upon Britain to "prohibit the export of the sold artefacts" until the Egyptian authorities were shown the documents. It suggested the issue could have an impact on cultural relations, by referencing "the ongoing cooperation between both countries in the field of archaeology, especially that there are 18 British archaeological missions are working in Egypt". The NCAR added

it had hired a British law firm to file a "civil lawsuit" although no further details were given.

### 'Stolen from Karnak'

The London sale of the head of "Boy King" Tutankhamun angered Egyptian officials at the time and sparked a protest outside Christie's by about a dozen people who held up signs reading "stop trading in smuggled antiquities". Hawass told AFP that the piece appeared to have been "stolen" in the 1970s from the Karnak Temple complex just north of Luxor and the Egyptian foreign ministry asked the UK Foreign Office and the UN cultural body UNESCO to step in and halt the sale.

But such interventions are rare and made only when there is clear evidence of the item's legitimate acquisition by the seller being in dispute. Christie's argued that Egypt had never before expressed the same level of concern about an item whose existence has been "well known and exhibited publicly" for many years. "The object is not, and has not been, the subject of an investigation," Christie's said in a statement to AFP. The auction house has published a chronology of how the relic changed hands between European art dealers over the past 50 years and told AFP that it would "not sell any work where there isn't clear title of ownership". — AFP



## Black music fest halts double-price tickets for whites after uproar

**A** Detroit music festival cancelled plans to charge white people double the price for tickets paid by African-Americans and other non-whites late Sunday after an uproar over the policy. The AfroFuture Fest planned for August 3 originally announced that tickets for "people of color" would cost \$10 while those for "non-POC" or "white people," could cost \$20 if purchased early, and \$20 or \$40, respectively, if sold closer to the date of the festival. "Our ticket structure was built to insure that the most marginalized communities (people of color) are provided with an equitable chance at enjoying events in their own community (black Detroit)," they explained in a

festival announcement. But the policy drew sharp criticism from whites and some blacks, and a biracial Detroit rapper known as Tiny Jag announced she would not appear at the show because of the policy. That forced the organizers in the majority African-American city, a community group called Afrofuture Youth, to reverse course Sunday and set all ticket prices at \$20. Organizer Adrienne Ayers said the original pricing was set to "promote equity over equality" for blacks. "The ticket structure is set up to support the most marginalized. Often times when dope events happen in Detroit the cheapest tickets are bought and then sold by people not from the community (because) they can afford

them first, leaving higher price tickets as the only options left," she said on Twitter on July 2.

The policy was changed Sunday. Afrofuture Youth announced. "For the safety of our community, family, elders who received threats from white supremacists, & youth who were subjected to seeing racist comments" on social media. All tickets will be \$20, but the group suggests additional donations from "nonPOC" attendees. The controversy came amid growing talk of the US government and communities paying reparations to African Americans for centuries of slavery, discrimination and abuse. A leading advocate for reparations, Ta-

Nehisi Coates, told a hearing in Congress in June that African-Americans continue to suffer the consequences of that legacy. Today, he said, "The typical black family in this country has one-tenth the wealth of the typical white family."

"Black women die in childbirth at four times the rate of white women. And there is, of course, the shame of this land of the free boasting the largest prison population on the planet, of which the descendants of the enslaved make up the largest share." — AFP