



Welcome, Kevin

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It may be hard to swallow, but red is the colour of lust Friday September 30th 2005

THEY say personality is more important than looks to women - but try telling that to the North American barn swallow.

Scientists found that female barn swallows will cheat on their partners if they spy a more handsome suitor.

The female bird constantly compares her mate with other males.

And should a more attractive proposition come along, the pair are likely to set up a secret love nest.

American researchers were able to influence the birds' mating habits by painting the throats, breast and belly feathers of randomly selected males with a red marker. For the female North American barn swallow, a red breast is best.

Rebecca Safran, of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, who led the study, said: "The bad news for male swallows is the mating game is never over. It is dynamic and continual.

"This is something that most humans can relate to - think of how much time and money we spend on our looks and status long after we have established relationships," she said.

Male swallows have a wash of reddish-chestnut colour from throat to belly, which varies between individuals.

Like many songbirds, half of all males typically care for at least one chick fathered by another bird, the research found.

Sometimes males rear an entire nest of illegitimate young.

All 30 females studied remained socially paired with their original mates, but they were sexually active with other males. (©Independent News Service)

**Sam Lister
in New York**

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