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- **Super Bowl XXXIX**
  - **New England 24    Philadelphia 21**
  - New England coach Bill Belichick celebrates with his team as the Patriots win another Super Bowl.

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Patriots hold off Eagles

New England wins its third Super Bowl in four years, 24-21 over Philadelphia. | Photo Gallery

Discuss the Patriots' win over the Philadelphia Eagles in Sunday's Super Bowl.

No MVP, but Brady excels when it counts

Area fans get caught up

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Coming Tuesday in The N&O

Duke's man in the middle: The Blue Devils' success in men's basketball this season is thanks, in part, to the mature play of center Shelden Williams. In Sports

Mideast gets visit from Rice

Condoleezza Rice says the U.S. will take steps to encourage peace talks.

Feds cuff gun-law violators

Some worry that effort to curb gun crime is sweeping in nonviolent offenders.

Iraqi police, U.S. military dispute raid

Attack on police station south of Baghdad has not been confirmed.

Male birds work hard to snag mates

But male songbirds quiet down once she-birds stay around, UNC-CH biologist learns.

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Party offers safe place for kids to socialize

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Carolina improves to 19-2 with 81-60 win
No thrill in 'Hide and Seek'
Here’s a movie so steadfast in its awfulness it makes "Godsend" look good.

Deli with an Italian accent
Variations on the deli theme are popping up all over the map.
Male birds work hard to snag mates

By CATHERINE CLABBY, Staff Writer

When the attention lavished early in a courtship fades, take heart. Nature -- not a mate's uncaring ways -- may be to blame.

A UNC-Chapel Hill biologist has discovered that male songbirds work hardest to lure attractive females when success is uncertain. When she-birds stick around, males quiet down.

The finding strengthens growing evidence that many creatures, including primates, temporarily exert big effort to snag mates.

Keith Sockman, an assistant biology professor at Chapel Hill, published his findings last week on Cassin's finches, redheaded songbirds found in pine forests in the American West.

Scientists have long known that male Cassin's finches sing to lure females their way. But Sockman wanted to know when they really belted out their songs.

In a series of experiments using 20 once-wild finches, he and scientists helping with the project placed males in cages by themselves. They placed females in separate cages next to them but then removed them.

Using a microphone installed above the cages, the scientist recorded each song sung when females disappeared. Somehow the finches knew which potential mates were very fertile -- something not clear to scientists until weeks later when the birds molted.

"They'd sing five or 10 songs an hour after losing less fertile birds. But in response to losing the very fertile birds, they'd sing 300 songs an hour," Sockman said.

Once the females were returned, the birds got quiet.
Assuming one animal's behavior can explain another's is fraught with peril. Earth's creatures vary profoundly. But biologists increasingly observe all sorts of animals, including primates, pouring extra efforts into early "courtships."

A male baboon, for one, will work harder to keep other males from a highly fertile female than from less fertile females. Once again, humans can't tell when the females are at that stage, but baboons can.

But males aren't the only ones in this game. Monica Moore, a psychology professor at Webster University in Missouri, has spent decades studying women's behavior during early courtship.

In settings where unattached men and women know they are likely to find a love interest -- say dance clubs or campus student unions -- flirting women give men attention in ways that don't show up elsewhere.

They move more, for one thing. Their facial expressions change frequently, they smooth their hair again and again, they hike their skirts. "Their behavior is just dramatically different," Moore said.

Moore isn't certain whether nature or nurture explains why. But Sockman said it's likely most creatures expend more energy when trying to snag an attractive mate. And it may be impossible to sustain such efforts over long periods of time.

Other work beckons, including feeding and sheltering themselves and their young, said Sockman, who tackled the bird project and other research during post-doctoral studies subsidized over three years by a $100,000 National Institutes of Health grant.

Biologists such as Sockman describe the mating game as an example of "maximizing ratios of benefit to cost," or adjusting "output to probable dividends."

But here's another way to tell it: Pouring it on early might be more about smarts than about hearts.

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