# Limits to load-lifting performance in a passerine bird: the effects of intraspecific variation in morphological and kinematic parameters

Yang Wang [Equal first author, 1] , Yuan Yin [Equal first author, 1] , Shiyong Ge [1] , Mo Li [1] , Qian Zhang [1] , Juyong Li [1] , Yuefeng Wu [1] , Dongming Li [Corresp., 1] , Robert Dudley [2]

[1] Key Laboratory of Animal Physiology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of Hebei Province, College of Life Sciences, Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang, Hebei, China

[2] Department of Integrative Biology, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, California, United States

Corresponding Author: Dongming Li
Email address: lidongming@hebtu.edu.cn

Although more massive flight muscles along with larger wings, higher wingbeat frequencies, and greater stroke amplitudes enhance force and power production in flapping flight, the extent to which these parameters may be correlated with other morphological features relevant to flight physiology and biomechanics remains unclear. Intraspecifically, we hypothesized that greater vertical load-lifting capacity would correlate with higher wingbeat frequencies and relatively more massive flight muscles, along with relatively bigger hearts, lungs, and stomachs to enhance metabolic capacity and energy supply, but also with smaller body size given the overall negative allometric dependence of maximum flight performance in volant taxa. To explore intraspecific correlates of flight performance, we assembled a large dataset that included thirteen morphological and kinematic variables for a non-migratory passerine, the Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*). We found that heavier flight muscles and larger wings, heavier stomachs, and shorter bills were the most important correlates of maximum load-lifting capacity. Surprisingly, wingbeat frequency, wing stroke amplitude, and masses of the heart, lungs, and digestive organs (except for the stomach) were non-significant predictor variables relative to lifting capacity. The best-fit structural equation model indicated that load-lifting capacity was positively correlated with flight muscle mass, wing area, and stomach mass, but was negatively correlated with bill length. Characterization of individual variability in flight performance in a free-ranging passerine indicates the subtlety of interaction effects among morphological features, some of which differ from those that have been identified interspecifically for maximum flight performance in birds.

1 **Manuscript Title**

2 **Limits to load-lifting performance in a passerine bird: the effects of**

3 **intraspecific variation in morphological and kinematic parameters**

5 Yang Wang[1,†], Yuan Yin[1,†], Shiyong Ge[1], Mo Li[1], Qian Zhang[1], Juyong Li[1], Yuefeng Wu[1],    Dongming

6 Li[1,*] and Robert Dudley[2]

7 [1] Key Laboratory of Animal Physiology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of Hebei

8 Province, College of Life Sciences, Hebei Normal University, Shijiazhuang 050024, P. R. China

9 [2] Department of Integrative Biology, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

11 [†] These authors contributed equally to this work.

13 ***Running title:*** Maximum load-lifting capacity in sparrows

15 [*]Corresponding author:

16 Dongming Li[1] E-mail: lidngmng@gmail.com, telephone: 86-311-80787556, fax: 86-311-

17 80787555

18   **Abstract**

19   Although more massive flight muscles along with larger wings, higher wingbeat frequencies, and

20   greater stroke amplitudes enhance force and power production in flapping flight, the extent to

21   which these parameters may be correlated with other morphological features relevant to flight

22   physiology and biomechanics remains unclear. Intraspecifically, we hypothesized that greater

23   vertical load-lifting capacity would correlate with higher wingbeat frequencies and relatively

24   more massive flight muscles, along with relatively bigger hearts, lungs, and stomachs to enhance

25   metabolic capacity and energy supply, but also with smaller body size given the overall negative

26   allometric dependence of maximum flight performance in volant taxa. To explore intraspecific

27   correlates of flight performance, we assembled a large dataset that included thirteen

28   morphological and kinematic variables for a non-migratory passerine, the Eurasian tree sparrow

29   (*Passer montanus*). We found that heavier flight muscles and larger wings, heavier stomachs,

30   and shorter bills were the most important correlates of maximum load-lifting capacity.

31   Surprisingly, wingbeat frequency, wing stroke amplitude, and masses of the heart, lungs, and

32   digestive organs (except for the stomach) were non-significant predictor variables relative to

33   lifting capacity. The best-fit structural equation model indicated that load-lifting capacity was

34   positively correlated with flight muscle mass, wing area, and stomach mass, but was negatively

35   correlated with bill length. Characterization of individual variability in flight performance in a

36   free-ranging passerine indicates the subtlety of interaction effects among morphological features,

37   some of which differ from those that have been identified interspecifically for maximum flight

38   performance in birds.

39   **Keywords:** Eurasian tree sparrow, flight performance, kinematics, maximum load-lifting

40   capacity

41

## Introduction

Birds exhibit a broad diversity of flight-related morphological and physiological characteristics (Hedenström, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Puttick et al., 2014; Altshuler et al., 2015; Butler, 2016), many of which reflect multiple trade-offs in flight performance (see Goslow et al., 1990; Ellington, 1991; Chai and Dudley, 1999; Lind 2001; Lind & Jakobsson 2001; Altshuler et al., 2015). For example, larger species typically possess bigger wings and higher pectoral muscle mass, whereas wingbeat frequency declines with increasing body mass (e.g., Groom et al., 2018); higher wingbeat frequencies and greater stroke amplitudes nonetheless yield increased force and power production (e.g., Chai and Dudley, 1995; Hedenström, 2002; Altshuler et al., 2015). Wing morphological and kinematic features along with flight-related muscle, are thus key variables influencing flight performance.

Avian flight is an energy-demanding activity requiring powerful respiratory and cardiovascular systems to support the intense metabolism of the associated skeletal muscles (Hedenström, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Altshuler et al., 2015; Butler, 2016; Nespolo et al., 2018). As major metabolic engines, heart and lung capacities underpin both burst power and endurance flight performance (see Bishop and Butler, 1995; Wright et al., 2014). Moreover, larger nutritional organs and increases in the quantity of digestive enzymes and nutrient transporters are essential to meet the high-energy demands of flight (Karasov and McWilliams, 2005). For example, many birds exhibited a reduction in the pectoralis primary mass as a consequence of lowered nutritional supplies in post-migratory periods (Dietz et al., 2007; Piersma and Dietz, 2007). Therefore, respiratory, cardiovascular, and nutritional systems represent important features for sustaining powered flight.

Other morphological factors contributing to an increase in body mass could be considered as hindering features that reduce available power for flight (Ellington, 1991; Dial, 2003). For example, a toothless beak in extant birds is believed to increase flight efficiency by reducing overall body mass (Louchart and Viriot, 2011). However, relationships among diverse

68    morphological features relative to flight capability in free-living birds have not been well

69    investigated.

70         Maximum load-lifting capacity (as imposed via asymptotic loading; Buchwald and Dudley,

71    2010), is an informative means of evaluating burst capacity in volant taxa (e.g., Altshuler et al.,

72    2004; 2010; Sun et al., 2016). To date, interspecific comparisons have evaluated morphological

73    and functional correlates of the maximum load-lifting capacity of free-living birds (see

74    Hedenström, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Altshuler et al., 2015; Butler, 2016; Groom et al., 2018;

75    Nespolo et al., 2018), however, much less information is available about intraspecific

76    determinants of maximum loading-lifting capacity. Intraspecifically, we hypothesize that

77    maximum load-lifting capacity will be positively influenced by key morphological and kinematic

78    features relevant to force and power production (e.g., relatives size of flight muscles and the

79    wings, wingbeat frequency, and stroke amplitude), as well as by metabolically relevant features

80    (including hearts, lungs, and digestive organs relevant to sustained flight).

81         To evaluate these hypotheses, we assembled a large dataset with a total of 13 variables of

82    morphological, internal anatomical, and biomechanical variables for a non-migrant passerine,

83    namely the Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*). We first determined statistically the most

84    important variables contributing to maximum load-lifting capacity (total lifted load, i.e., the sum

85    of body mass and the maximum supplemental load), as determined by asymptotic load-lifting

86    experiments. We further assessed the relative contribution of each variable to maximum load-

87    lifting capacity, then identified the most critical factors influencing intraspecific variation using

88    multiple-variable interactions and structural equation model (SEM) in this transient feature of

89    flight performance.

## Materials & Methods

### Bird collection

Totals of 33 male and 39 female adult Eurasian tree sparrows were captured opportunistically using mist nets during the late winter of 2017 (i.e., 13 March to 1 April) at five different lowland sites (Dongyangshi: N37.9667°, E114.602°; Yuhuaqu: N38.021°, E114.526°; Changanqu: N38.058°, E114.547°; Xiangzigou: N38.309°, E114.001°; Mayu: N38.322°, E113.962°; site elevational range from 80 - 203 m) around Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, People's Republic of China. Within 30 min post-capture, body mass to within 0.01g was measured for each bird using a portable digital balance.

### Load-lifting assay

Birds were placed individually (within 3 hours of capture) in a rectangular flight chamber (45 cm × 45 cm × 150 cm) made from transparent acrylic sheet, as used in previous experiments (Sun et al., 2016). Each bird was evaluated for asymptotic load-lifting capacity using an assay described in detail elsewhere (see Sun et al., 2016). Briefly, a thread with different plastic beads (each approximately 1.0 g in mass) and positioned at fixed linear intervals was attached to the left tarsometatarsus of the sparrow. When released from the bottom of the chamber, birds typically flew vertically towards the top, asymptotically lifting more and more beads until a maximum load was attained. Two cameras were used in this experiment; one high-speed video camera (JVC GCP100BAC; operated at 50 frames$^{-1}$; see Supplemental material) positioned laterally at a distance of 80 cm to the chamber was used to film the beads remaining on the chamber floor during maximum load-lifting flight, and thus by subtraction to determine the total extra weight lifted by the bird. The other synchronized camera (JVC GCP100BAC, operated at 250 frames$^{-1}$; see Supplemental material), was positioned laterally near the top of the chamber (see Sun et al., 2016) and was used to obtain wingbeat frequency and stroke amplitude.

Multiple ascending flights were recorded for each bird (mean of 4.7 flights), and the maximum weight lifted within the series was assumed to indicate the limit to load-lifting flight

116 performance. Wingbeat frequency was determined from the number of frames required to

117 complete an integral number of wingbeats for a composite sequence containing multiple flapping

118 cycles, but starting and finishing at the same vertical position of the wings. Wing stroke

119 amplitude was calculated as the angle between extreme wing tip positions (i.e., the point of the

120 outermost primary feather relative to the longitudinal body axis) at extremes of the nominally

121 vertical wing stroke, as filmed by the top lateral camera (see Sun et al., 2016). A mean value for

122 stroke amplitude was calculated from three to five separate measurements within each bout of

123 maximum load within the final 0.5 s of peak lifting.

124 **Morphological, anatomical, and kinematic parameters**

125     To identify potential influences total lifted load, we determined for each individual bird a

126 total of 13 variables of morphological (sex, body mass, bill length, total wing area, aspect ratio),

127 internal anatomical (the masses of flight muscle, heart, lung, liver, stomach, and gut length), and

128 biomechanical relevance (wingbeat frequency and amplitude). Following load-lifting

129 experiments, each bird was immediately euthanized with phenobarbitone (7.5 µl g$^{-1}$ body mass),

130 and its bill length was measured to the nearest 0.1 mm using Vernier calipers. The right wing

131 was photographed for measurements of wing area and wing length $R$ (analyzed using ImageJ,

132 National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, USA); total wing area $S$ is given by twice the area

133 of the right wing. The aspect ratio is given by $(2R)^2/S$. The pectoralis major, pectoralis minor,

134 and the whole heart, lung, liver (all following blotting to remove blood), along with the fresh gut

135 and stomach (food residue was removed by washing with water), were then excised and weighed

136 using a digital balance sensitive to 0.1 mg (with gut length measured to $\pm1$ mm). All protocols

137 were approved by the Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee (no. 2013-6) and by the

138 Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (HEBTU2013-7) of Hebei Normal University,

139 China, and were carried out under the auspices of scientific collecting permits issued by the

140 Department of Wildlife Conservation (Forestry Bureau) of Hebei Province, China.

141 **Statistical analyses**

142     We calculated means and standard deviations for gross morphological (body mass, bill

143     length, total wing area, aspect ratio), internal anatomical (the masses of flight muscle, heart, lung,

144     liver, stomach, and gut length), and kinematic variables (wingbeat frequency and wing stroke

145     amplitude). We determined Pearson correlations between maximum load-lifting flight

146     performance (i.e., total lifted load) and all other variables, including sex as a discrete covariate.

147     We then implemented a generalized linear model (GLM) using the *glm* function in Program R v.

148     3.4.2 (Pinheiro et al., 2015) to model relationships between dependent factors (i.e., total lifted

149     load) and all independent variables, with sex as a discrete covariate. All continuous variables

150     were scaled (i.e., centralized and standardized; Schielzeth, 2010) before such modeling to reduce

151     multicollinearity. Multiparameter models were discarded if a nested model (i.e., collinearity

152     among factors) containing a subset of the same parameters had a better Akaike's Information

153     Criterion (AIC) score. To account for model selection uncertainty, model-averaged estimates of

154     variable coefficients were computed using the 'best model set', defined as the set of models for

155     which delta AIC was less than 6 (see Burnham and Anderson, 2002). All possible models were

156     averaged to identify the most important variables, using the importance score in the MuMIn

157     package (Kamil, 2013) of Program R v.3.4.2. We ranked all variables selected by the average

158     model, and then considered those variables with a higher relative importance score (i.e., >0.7) as

159     determinant variables for total lifted load. We further assessed whether there were level-two

160     interaction effects on maximum load-lifting flight performance, and then selected those most

161     important variables underlying variance in total lifted load by identifying those with relative

162     importance scores > 0.7. Finally, we constructed a SEM in the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012)

163     of Program R v.3.4.2, including all combinations of those important variables as identified by

164     AIC scores, and selected the best model with a Chi-square test, the root mean square error of

165     approximation (RMSEA), the standard root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative

166     fit index (CFI). We assumed a well-fitted model to have a p-value > 0.05 for the Chi-square test,

167     a RMSEA and SRMR test with values less than 0.1, and a CFI close to 1 (i.e., >0.9). The

168 relationships between measured variables and total lifted load were represented by regression

169 coefficients; all path coefficients used standardized estimates.

170 **Results**

171  Total lifted load was positively correlated with diverse traits, including body mass, wing

172 area, the masses of flight muscle, heart, lung, liver, stomach, and length of gut (Table 1). Among

173 all measured variables, variation in total lifted load was best explained by variability in bill

174 length, stomach mass, gut length, wing area, and flight muscle mass (Table 2). However, sex and

175 other morphological (body mass, aspect ratio), internal anatomical (masses of heart, lung, and

176 liver), and kinematic features (wingbeat frequency and wing stroke amplitude) did not

177 significantly predict variation in maximum load-lifting capacity (Table 2). Specifically, heavier

178 flight muscles, a greater stomach mass, larger wings, and a longer gut but also shorter bills were

179 strongly correlated with total lifted load. Among these five variables, flight muscle mass, bill

180 length, wing area, and stomach mass were the four most important factors predicting total lifted

181 load when all level-two interactions were considered (Table 3).

182  The best SEM consisting of the four most important variables ,including flight muscle mass,

183 bill length, wing area, and stomach mass, was well-fitted ($\chi^2$ = 3.21, $df$ = 2, $p$ = 0.201; RMSEA =

184 0.092, SRMR = 0.071, CFI = 0.983; see Figure 1). Total lifted load was positively correlated

185 with sizes of the flight muscles and wings, and with stomach mass, but was negatively correlated

186 with bill length (Table S1, Figure 1). We also found masses of the flight muscle to be positively

187 correlated with both bill length and stomach mass (Table S2, Figure 1).

188 **Discussion**

189  Many external morphological and internal anatomical measurements are positively

190 correlated with maximum load-lifting performance in Eurasian tree sparrows (Table 1), but the

191 strongest correlates are a greater flight muscle mass, larger wings, heavier stomach, and a shorter

192 bill (Table 3), all of which are independent of sex. Interspecifically for birds, wingbeat frequency

193 and wing stroke amplitude are key flight kinematic variables for production of aerodynamic

194 power output, along with larger wings (Chai and Dudley, 1999; Hedenström, 2002; Altshuler et

195 al., 2015). By contrast, we here determined that wingbeat frequency and wing stroke amplitude

196 were not strong intraspecific determinants of maximum load-lifting capacity. Variation among

197 individuals in both wing stroke amplitude and wingbeat frequency during maximum load-lifting

198 was small (i.e., less than 3% and 10%, respectively; see Table 1). These results are similar to

199 previous findings in Eurasian tree sparrows showing that wing stroke amplitude during

200 maximum load-lifting did not vary across elevational gradients (Sun et al., 2016). Wingbeat

201 frequency did not affect the maximum load-lifting capacity for the lowland populations studied

202 here but did increase in intraspecific comparisons of populations across an altitudinal gradient

203 (Sun et al., 2016). Wingbeat frequency is thus a potential determinant of maximum load-lifting

204 capacity that can vary interspecifically among birds, and that may covary with other

205 morphological traits such as body mass and wing area, but that is relatively invariant within

206 individual populations of these free-living passerines during maximum load-lifting flight. Other

207 flight kinematic parameters, such as downstroke:upstroke ratio, wing angle of attack, and stroke

208 plane angle, may also vary among individuals in maximum load-lifting and warrant further

209 investigation.

210      In volant taxa, flight muscle mass is an important feature contributing to maximum force

211 production (see Plateau 1865, Marden 1987). Similarly, maximum load-lifting ability (and likely

212 power production as well) in Eurasian tree sparrows is positively influenced by more massive

213 locomotor muscles, but also by wing area (Figure 1, Table 3; see also Lind & Jakobsson 2001).

214 In general, sustained power production by flight muscle can be constrained by interactions

215 between oxygen supply, substrate availability, and muscle demand from other physiological

216 systems, e.g., the digestive organs or respiratory and circulatory systems (Suarez et al., 1997;

217 Nespolo et al., 2018). However, flight performance during maximum load-lifting by sparrows

218 showed only weak correlations with the sizes of the heart, lung, gut, and liver, but did show a

219 positive correlation with stomach mass (see Table 3; Figure 1). In short-duration flights, oxygen

220   and energy supply may not limit such performance, which may be largely anaerobic in character

221   (Altimiras, 2017). Alternatively, aerodynamic force production by the wings can directly

222   constrain whole-animal vertical load-lifting (e.g., Chai et al., 1996), as opposed to limits on

223   power production by the flight muscle. Eurasian tree sparrows are non-migratory and also are a

224   human commensal species (del Hoyo et al., 2017), and as such are much less engaged in

225   substantial lipid loading or digestive tract reduction (as characterizes many long-distance

226   migrants; e.g., Piersma and Gill, 1998). Larger digestive organs may thus indirectly correlate

227   with better burst flight performance in non-migratory avian species. Shorter bills were correlated

228   with higher maximum load-lifting capacity in Eurasian tree sparrows when effects of variable

229   flight muscle mass were incorporated (Table 3; Figure 1), which may reflect unmeasured

230   features of foraging behavior on flight ability, such as differential foraging strategies associated

231   with bill size and matched by changes in flight performance. Bill size also influences heat

232   transfer capacity in some birds (Ryeland et al., 2017; Tattersall et al., 2017), and can limit the

233   suitability of prey items and thus foraging styles (Cruz et al., 2001), so that multiple aspects of

234   bill size may be under selection.

235      Lift production from the wings of Eurasian tree sparrows may increase with aspect ratio, as

236   in hummingbirds (Kruyt et al., 2014), but a detailed aerodynamic analysis of sparrow takeoff

237   relative to wing design is not available. Although the Eurasian tree sparrow is typically thought

238   of as a sexually monomorphic species, females did have shorter wings and a reduced wing area

239   relative to males (see Mónus et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2016). However, sex was not a determinant

240   of maximum load-lifting capacity, indicating that female sparrows have comparable flight

241   performance relative to males in spite of their smaller wings. How natural selection has enabled

242   females to achieve similar lifting ability is intriguing and warrants further investigation.

243

## Conclusions

245      Maximum load-lifting flight performance of individual Eurasian tree sparrows was

246   correlated with multiple morphological factors, including flight muscle mass, wing, and bill

247 lengths, wing area, and stomach, but was unrelated to sex, various internal anatomical features,

248 and measured wingbeat kinematics. Hypothesized effects of the sizes of flight muscles and wings

249 on maximum load-lifting capacity was confirmed. Kinematic features (wingbeat frequency and

250 wing stroke amplitude) showed no such intraspecific effects, whereas a larger bill and a smaller

251 stomach compromised flight performance. Overall, the characterization of individual variability

252 in flight performance in a free-living passerine indicates subtlety of interactions among multiple

253 morphological features, some of which differ from those that have been identified

254 interspecifically among birds. Eurasian tree sparrows are also social flockers, and selection on

255 escape performance from the ground may depend in part on group response to a perceived threat.

256 The extent to which vertical accelerations are used in this behavior, and the extent to which other

257 aspects of maneuverability (e.g., rotational ability) are important remain to be investigated. As a

258 human commensal and hyperabundant bird species across the Eurasian continent, such effects

259 are readily amenable to future study under field conditions.

260

261 ## Acknowledgments

262 ### Data Accessibility

263 Supplemental information for this article can be found online.

264 ### Conflicts of Interest

265 The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

266 ### Authors' Contributions

267 D.L. and R.D. conceived the ideas and designed the study; Y.W., Y.Y., S.G.,M.L., Q.Z. and

268 J.L. conducted the experiment and collected the data; Y.W. carried out the statistical analyses

269 with helps of D.L. and Y.W.; D.L., Y.W. and R.D. wrote the manuscript. All authors contributed

270 to the various drafts and gave final approval for publication.

271  **ORCID**

272  Yang Wang: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6626-8278

273  Yuan Yin: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9661-612X

274  Shiyong Ge: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0878-3540

275  Mo Li: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1776-4085

276  Qian Zhang: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9906-4842

277  Juyong Li: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7929-427X

278  Yuefeng Wu: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5121-0049

279  Dongming Li: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2759-3435

280  Robert Dudley: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3707-5682

## References

**Altimiras, J., Lindgren, I., Giraldo-Deck, Lina María, Matthei, A., & Garitano-Zavala, álvaro.** (2017). Aerobic performance in tinamous is limited by their small heart. A novel hypothesis in the evolution of avian flight. *Sci Rep*, 7(1), 15964. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-16297-2

**Altshuler, D., Dudley, R., Heredia, S. and McGuire, J.** (2010). Allometry of hummingbird lifting performance. *J. Exp. Biol.* **213**, 725-734. https://doi.org/10.1242/jeb.037002

**Altshuler, D.L., Bahlman, J.W., Dakin, R., Gaede, A.H., Goller, B., Lentink, D. and Skandalis, D.A.** (2015). The biophysics of bird flight: functional relationships integrate aerodynamics, morphology, kinematics, muscles, and sensors. *Can. J. Zool.* **93**, 961-975. https://doi.org/10.1139/cjz-2015-0103

**Altshuler, D.L., Dudley, R. and McGuire, J.A.** (2004). Resolution of a paradox: hummingbird flight at high elevation does not come without a cost. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **101**, 17731-17736. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0405260101

**Bishop, C. and Butler, P.** (1995). Physiological modelling of oxygen consumption in birds during flight. *J. Exp. Biol.* **98**, 2153-2163.

**Buchwald, R. and Dudley, R.** (2010). Limits to vertical force and power production in bumblebees (Hymenoptera: *Bombus impatiens*). *J. Exp. Biol.* **213**, 426-432. https://doi.org/10.1242/jeb.033563

**Burnham, K. P. and Anderson, D. R.** (2002). Model selection and multimodel inference. Springer.

**Butler, P.J.** (2016) The physiological basis of bird flight. *Phil. Trans. Royal Soc. B* **371**, 1704. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0384

**Chai, P. and Dudley, R.** (1995). Limits to vertebrate locomotor energetics suggested by hummingbirds hovering in heliox. *Nature* **377**, 722. https://doi.org/10.1086/303179

**Chai, P. and Dudley, R.** (1999). Maximum flight performance of hummingbirds: capacities, constraints, and trade-offs. *Am. Nat.* **153**, 398-411. https://doi.org/10.1086/303179

304    **Chai, P., Harrykissoon, R. and Dudley, R.** (1996). Hummingbird hovering performance in hyperoxic heliox:

305        effects of body mass and sex. *J. Exp. Biol.* **199**, 2745-2755.

306        https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phytochem.2007.10.005

307    **Cruz, J.B., Lalas, C., Jillett, J.B., Kitson, J.C., Lyver, P.O.B., Imber, M. and Moller, H.** (2001) Prey spectrum

308        of breeding sooty shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus*) in New Zealand. *N. Z. J. Mar. Freshwater Res.* **35**, 817-

309        829. https://doi.org/10.1080/00288330.2001.9517044

310    **del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A., de Juana, E.E.** (2017). Handbook of the Birds of the World

311        Alive. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions (retrieved from www.hbw.com).

312    **Dietz, M.W., Piersma, T., Hedenström, A. and Brugge, M.** (2007). Intraspecific variation in avian pectoral

313        muscle mass: constraints on maintaining manoeuvrability with increasing body mass.        *Funct. Ecol.* **21**,

314        317-326. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2435.2006.01234.x

315    **Ellington, C.** (1991). Limitations on animal flight performance. *J. Exp. Biol.* **160**, 71-91.

316    **Goslow Jr, G., Dial, K. and Jenkins Jr, F.** (1990). Bird flight: insights and complications. *BioScience* **40**, 108-115.

317        https://doi.org/10.2307/1311343

318    **Groom, D.J., Toledo, M.C.B., Powers, D.R., Tobalske, B.W. and Welch, K.C.** (2018). Integrating morphology

319        and kinematics in the scaling of hummingbird hovering metabolic rate and efficiency. *Proc. Royal Soc. B*

320        **285**, 20172011. https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.2011.

321    **Hedenström, A.** (2002). Aerodynamics, evolution and ecology of avian flight. *Trends Ecol. Evol.* **17**, 415-422.

322        https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-5347 (02)02568-5

323    **Kamil, B.** (2013). MuMIn: multi-model inference. *R package version 1.9.0.* http://CRAN.R-

324        project.org/package=MuMIn.

325    **Karasov, W.H. and McWilliams, S.R.** (2005). Digestive constraints in mammalian and avian ecology. In J.M.

326        Starck and T. Wang (Eds.), *Physiological and ecological adaptations to feeding in vertebrates* (pp. 87-112).

327        Enfield, NH: Science Publishers.

328    **Dial, K.P.** (2003). Evolution of avian locomotion: correlates of flight style, locomotor modules, nesting biology,

329        body size, development, and the origin of flapping flight. *Auk*, **120**, 941-952. https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-

330        8038(2003)120[0941:EOALCO]2.0.CO;2

331    **Kruyt, J.W., Quicazánrubio, E.M., Heijst, G.J.F.V., Altshuler, D.L. and Lentink, D.** (2014). Hummingbird

332        wing efficacy depends on aspect ratio and compares with helicopter rotors. *J. Royal Soc. Interface* **11**,

333        20140585-20140585. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2014.0585

334    **Lee, M.S., Cau, A., Naish, D. and Dyke, G.J.** (2014). Sustained miniaturization and anatomical innovation in the

335        dinosaurian ancestors of birds. *Science.* **345**, 562-566. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1252243

336    **Lind J.** (2011). Escape flight in moulting tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*). Funct. Ecol. **15**, 29-35.

337    **Lind J, and Jakobsson S.** (2011). Body building and concurrent mass loss: flight adaptations in tree sparrows. *Proc.*

338        *R. Soc. B.* **268**, 1915-1919. 10.1098/rspb.2001.1740

339    **Louchart, A., and Viriot, L.** (2011). From snout to beak: the loss of teeth in birds. *Trends Ecol. Evol.*, **26**, 663-673.

340        https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2011.09.004

341    **Marden, J. H.** (1987). Maximum lift production during takeoff in flying animals. *J. Exp. Biol.*, **130**, 235-258.

342    **Mónus, F., Szabó, K.L., A. and Pénzes, Z.** (2011). Intersexual size and plumage differences in tree sparrows

343        (*Passer montanus*) – a morphological study based on molecular sex determination.    *Acta Zool. Acad. Sci.*

344        *Hung.* **57**, 269-276.

345    **Nespolo, R.F., González-Lagos, C., Solano-Iguaran, J.J., Elfwing, M., Garitano-Zavala, A., Mañosa, S. and**

346        **Altimiras, J.** (2018). Aerobic power and flight capacity in birds: a phylogenetic test of the heart-size

347        hypothesis. *J. Exp. Biol.* **221**, jeb175208. https://doi.org/10.1242/jeb.162693

348    **Piersma, T. and Dietz, M.W.** (2007). Twofold seasonal variation in the supposedly constant, species-specific, ratio

349        of upstroke to downstroke flight muscles in red knots *Calidris canutus*. *J. Avian Biol.* **38**, 536-540.

350        https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2007.0908-8857.04253.x

351    **Pinheiro, J., Bates, D., DebRoy, S., Sarkar, D. and Team, R.C.** (2015). nlme: Linear and nonlinear mixed effects

352    models. *R package version 3.1-122. 2015.* http://CRAN.Rproject.org/package=nlme.

353    **Plateau, F.** (1865). Sur la force musculaire des insects. *Bull. Acad. R. Belg. Cl. Sci.* **34**, 732-757.

354    **Puttick, M.N., Thomas, G.H. and Benton, M.J.** (2014). High rates of evolution preceded the origin of birds.

355         *Evolution* **68**, 1497-1510. https://doi.org/10.1111/evo.12363

356    **Rosseel, Y.** (2012). lavaan: An R Package for Structural Equation Modeling. *J. Stat. Softw.*, **48**, 1-36.

357         http://www.jstatsoft.org/v48/i02/.

358    **Ryeland, J., Weston, M.A. and Symonds, M.R.E.** (2017). Bill size mediates behavioural thermoregulation in birds.

359         *Funct. Ecol.* **31**, 885-893. https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2435.12814

360    **Suarez, R., Staples, J., Lighton, J. and West, T.** (1997). Relationships between enzymatic flux capacities and

361         metabolic flux rates: nonequilibrium reactions in muscle glycolysis. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **94**, 7065-

362         7069. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.94.13.7065

363    **Schielzeth, H.** (2010). Simple means to improve the interpretability of regression coefficients. *Methods Ecol Evol*, **1**,

364         103-113. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-210X.2010.00012.x

365    **Sun, Y., Ren, Z., Wu, Y., Lei, F., Dudley, R. and Li, D.** (2016). Flying high: limits to flight performance by

366         sparrows on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. *J. Exp. Biol.* **219**, 3642-3648. http://doi.org/ 10.1242/jeb.142216

367    **Sun, Y., Li, M., Song, G., Lei, F., Li, D. and Wu, Y.** (2017). The role of climate factors in geographic variation in

368         body mass and wing length in a passerine bird. *Avian Res.* **8**, 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40657-016-0059-9

369    **Tattersall, G.J., Arnaout, B. and Symonds, M.R.** (2017). The evolution of the avian bill as a

370         thermoregulatory organ. *Biol. Rev. Camb. Philos. Soc.* **92**, 1630-1656.

371         https://doi.org/10.1111/brv.12299

372    **Wright, N.A., Gregory, T.R. and Witt, C.C.** (2014). Metabolic 'engines' of flight drive genome size reduction in

373         birds. *Proc. R. Soc. B.* **281**, 20132780. https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2013.2780

374

375 **Figure legends**

376 **Figure 1: The relationships among morphological parameters and their effects on total lifted load for**

377 **Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) in the best-fit structural equation model.** Total lifted load was

378 positively correlated with wing area, flight muscle mass, and stomach mass, and negatively correlated with bill

379 length. RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standard root mean square residual; CFI,

380 comparative fit index. *, p< 0.05; **, p<0.01; and ***, p<0.001.

Measured variables for morphology, internal anatomy, kinematics, and load-lifting performance for Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) as averaged for the two sexes, and their correlations with total lifted load (Lifted mass + body mass).

1  **Table 1. Measured variables for morphology, internal anatomy, kinematics, and load-lifting**
2  **performance for Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) as averaged for the two sexes, and their**
3  **correlations with total lifted load (Lifted mass + body mass).**

| Category of variable | Variable | Mean | SD | Correlation with total lifted load | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | $r$ | $r^2$ |
| **Morphology** | Body mass (g) | 19.216 | 1.194 | **0.539\*\*\*** | 0.291 |
| | Bill length (mm) | 8.558 | 0.497 | -0.051 | 0.003 |
| | Wing area (cm$^2$) | 80.678 | 6.581 | **0.362\*\*** | 0.131 |
| | Aspect ratio | 22.289 | 2.106 | -0.094 | 0.009 |
| **Internal anatomy** | Flight muscle mass (g) | 2.450 | 0.250 | **0.669\*\*\*** | 0.448 |
| | Heart mass (g) | 0.187 | 0.026 | **0.376\*\*** | 0.141 |
| | Lung mass (g) | 0.097 | 0.017 | **0.258\*** | 0.067 |
| | Liver mass (g) | 0.345 | 0.061 | **0.264\*** | 0.07 |
| | Stomach mass (g) | 0.323 | 0.075 | **0.325\*\*** | 0.106 |
| | Gut length (mm) | 136.395 | 7.297 | **0.262\*** | 0.069 |
| **Kinematics** | Wingbeat frequency (Hz) | 5.154 | 0.486 | 0.171 | 0.029 |
| | Wing stroke amplitude (°) | 151.389 | 3.704 | 0.079 | 0.006 |
| **Load-lifting performance** | Maximum load (g) | 26.027 | 4.592 | | |
| | Total lifted load (g) | 45.243 | 5.124 | | |

Model-averaged statistical results in the best model set (delta AIC <6) correlating total lifted load by Eurasian tree sparrows (Passer montanus) with morphological, physiological, and kinematic parameters.

1  **Table 2. Model-averaged statistical results in the best model set (delta AIC <6) correlating total lifted**
2  **load by Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) with morphological, physiological, and kinematic**
3  **parameters.**

| Response variable | Estimate | Adjusted SE | 95% CI | Relative importance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.006 | 0.095 | -0.180, 0.191 | |
| Bill length | -0.259 | 0.090 | -0.436, -0.083 | **1.00** |
| Flight muscle mass | 0.579 | 0.130 | 0.324, 0.834 | **1.00** |
| Stomach mass | 0.252 | 0.100 | -0.057, 0.447 | **1.00** |
| Wing area | 0.262 | 0.133 | 0.001, 0.523 | **0.96** |
| Gut length | 0.148 | 0.086 | -0.021, 0.317 | **0.70** |
| Heart mass | -0.136 | 0.108 | -0.349, 0.076 | 0.48 |
| Wingbeat frequency | 0.105 | 0.088 | -0.067, 0.277 | 0.46 |
| Aspect ratio | 0.146 | 0.140 | -0.129, 0.421 | 0.43 |
| Body mass | 0.131 | 0.117 | -0.099, 0.361 | 0.42 |
| Lung mass | -0.083 | 0.102 | -0.283, 0.117 | 0.33 |
| Wing stroke amplitude | 0.053 | 0.087 | -0.117, 0.223 | 0.28 |
| Sex | -0.050 | 0.217 | -0.476, 0.376 | 0.25 |
| Liver mass | 0.026 | 0.102 | -0.173, 0.225 | 0.25 |

Variables with relative importance score > 0.7 are shown in bold type, and were included in further analysis.

Model-averaged statistical results in the best model set (delta AIC < 6) correlating total lifted load of Eurasian tree sparrows (Passer montanus) with all selected variables (see Table 2), and with their level-two interactions.

1    **Table 3. Model-averaged statistical results in the best model set (delta AIC < 6) correlating total lifted**

2    **load of Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) with all selected variables (see Table 2), and with their**

3    **level-two interactions.**

| Variable | Estimate | Adjusted SE | 95% CI | Relative importance |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | -0.011 | 0.086 | -0.18, 0.158 | |
| Bill length | -0.262 | 0.088 | -0.434, -0.089 | **1.00** |
| Flight muscle mass | 0.611 | 0.098 | 0.419, 0.803 | **1.00** |
| Stomach mass | 0.223 | 0.085 | 0.056, 0.389 | **1.00** |
| Wing area | 0.180 | 0.089 | 0.006, 0.354 | **1.00** |
| Gut length | 0.113 | 0.091 | -0.066, 0.291 | 0.69 |
| Bill length × Flight muscle mass | 0.142 | 0.095 | -0.045, 0.329 | 0.57 |
| Flight muscle mass × Stomach mass | -0.109 | 0.103 | -0.311, 0.092 | 0.38 |
| Bill length × Stomach mass | 0.061 | 0.090 | -0.115, 0.238 | 0.26 |
| Flight muscle mass × Wing area | -0.040 | 0.085 | -0.207, 0.127 | 0.21 |
| Stomach mass × Wing area | -0.035 | 0.087 | -0.206, 0.137 | 0.20 |
| Bill length × Wing area | -0.015 | 0.127 | -0.263, 0.234 | 0.20 |
| Flight muscle mass × Gut length | 0.065 | 0.097 | -0.126, 0.255 | 0.17 |
| Bill length ×Gut length | 0.057 | 0.090 | -0.12, 0.233 | 0.15 |
| Gut length × Stomach mass | -0.034 | 0.102 | -0.233, 0.166 | 0.13 |
| Gut length × Wing area | 0.011 | 0.103 | -0.192, 0.214 | 0.10 |
| Variables with relative importance score > 0.7 are shown in bold type, and were included in further analysis. | | | | |

# Figure 1

The relationships among morphological parameters and their effects on total lifted load for Eurasian tree sparrows (*Passer montanus*) in the best-fit structural equation model.

Total lifted load was positively correlated with wing area, flight muscle mass, and stomach mass, and negatively correlated with bill length. RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standard root mean square residual; CFI, comparative fit index. *, p< 0.05; **, p<0.01; and ***, p<0.001.