

Email approach in humans matched to bird behaviour

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Scottish researchers have matched 12 different approaches to using email to typical behaviour in certain birds.

Among the categorisations is the night owl - a midnight emailer who does not recognise others wish to have time off.

The boorish parrot sends abusive or inappropriate emails and fails to understand why others get upset.

The team from Glasgow and West of Scotland Universities found the perfect emailer was the Robin, who makes time to speak to people in person.

Dr Karen Renaud, from Glasgow University's school of computing science, said: "Email has rapidly become a vital business communication tool and a lot of people we spoke to say they would not be able to do their jobs without it.

Compulsive woodpecker

"However, many people have gripes about email. Some people find themselves checking email all the time, even during evenings, weekends and holidays. Others complain about how other people behave when using email.

"When we analysed all the findings we realised we could categorise email behaviours and match them to the characteristics of some well-known birds."

Among the other categories identified were:

- Compulsive woodpecker who cannot resist reading email at all hours of the day and night
- Hibernating poorwill who reads email only occasionally so that senders can never rely on them
- Caterwauling peacock who broadcasts emails to all and sundry, claiming that people "need to know" when actually is just grandstanding
- Back-covering emu who sends emails in order to be able to prove, at a later date, that the information was passed on
- Echoing mynah who acknowledges all emails with terms such as "thanks", then "my pleasure", then "thanks again".

Dr Renaud said that most people would be able to identify some of their email correspondents with the behaviours outlined, and possibly recognise their own style.

She added: "What the research really highlights is that email is a great source of stress for many people.

"Too often, email is used instead of a more suitable means of communication like actually talking to someone.

"People send email without thinking of the cost to the recipient, but if everyone does this we all become much less efficient and no-one wins."

The research findings have been published in *Interfaces*, the quarterly magazine of the British Computer Society.