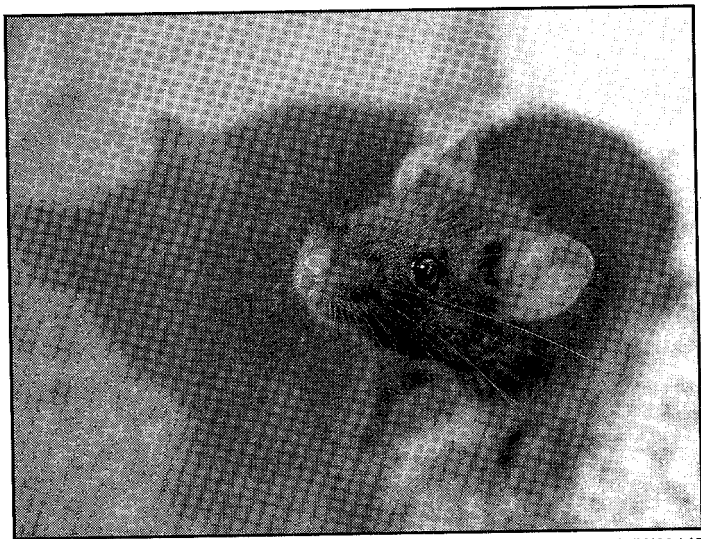


HEALTH AN



TOM GANNAM / AP

Male mice sing in the presence of the opposite sex, according to scientists who recorded and modified their songs for human ears.

Male mice sing love songs, study says

BY CHERYL WITTENAUER
The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS – Songbirds may be the Sinatras of the animal world, but male mice can carry a tune, too, say Washington University researchers who were surprised by what they heard.

Scientists have known for decades that male lab mice produce high-frequency sounds – undetectable by human ears – when they pick up the scent of a female mouse. This high-pitched babble is presumably for courtship, although scientists are not certain.

But those sounds are more complex and interesting than previously thought.

“It soon became . . . apparent that these vocalizations were not random twitterings but songs,” said researcher Timothy Holy. “There was a pattern to them. They sounded a lot like bird songs.”

The researchers provided audio recordings of the sounds, which have been modified for human ears.

The findings by the researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in

St. Louis were published online Tuesday in the journal *Public Library of Science Biology*.

If the analysis by the researchers is confirmed, mice can be added to the short list of creatures that sing in the presence of the opposite sex, including songbirds, humpback whales, porpoises and insects.

“There was joy in this discovery,” Holy said. “We didn’t expect it.”

The finding opens the possibility of using mice to study and develop treatments for autism and other communication disorders, said Holy, lead author and assistant professor of neurobiology and anatomy at the university’s medical school.

If it is true that the male mice are producing songs, it raises questions about how their sounds develop and whether mice – like birds – are able to learn new sounds, said animal communication expert Peter Marler, a behavioral neurobiologist at University of California-Davis.

Marler said the only mammals besides humans known to learn new sounds are whales and porpoises, and “they’re not exactly ideal for study.”