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Pigeon And Human Visual Systems Studied

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A U.S.-led international study has found pigeons and humans use similar visual cues to identify objects, although they utilize different visual systems.

The researchers, led by University of New Hampshire Assistant Professor Brett Gibson, say the finding could lead to development of novel technologies.

"Understanding how avian visual systems solve problems that require considerable computational prowess may lead to future technological advances, such as small visual prosthetics for the visually impaired, in the same way that understanding visual processing in honeybees has led to the development of flying robots and unmanned helicopters," the researchers said.

Gibson and colleagues from the universities of Iowa, Montreal and Glasgow found pigeons, as do humans, primarily rely on corners of an object in order to recognize it instead of relying on other features, such as shading and color.

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"When members of different species respond similarly to the same visual information, we gain confidence in the prominence of this information, irrespective of cultural or genetic influences," the scientists said. "Birds represent an important group to compare with mammals, the other major class of warm-blooded, highly mobile, visually oriented animals."

The study is detailed in the journal Current Biology.

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