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Why do caterpillars whistle at birds? Insect defence sounds startle avian predators

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Highlights

- Caterpillar defense whistles evoke startle responses in Red-winged blackbirds.
- Birds fly away and dive in response to sounds activated by a sensor while feeding on mealworms.
- Sound-startled birds are initially cautious to return to feed but habituate within an hour session.
- After two days startle responses are restored, showing that the element of surprise is important.

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