

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Sexually dimorphic behaviour and brain	1
1.2. Polymorphic behaviour and brain	2
1.3. The study of birdsong.....	4
1.4. The neural control of birdsong production and learning.....	6
1.5. Aim of the study	8
2. ANIMALS AND STUDY AREA.....	10
2.1. The white-browed sparrow weaver.....	10
2.2. Study area.....	11
2.3. Study site.....	12
3. GENERAL METHODS	15
3.1. Field methods	15
3.1.1. Capture, measurement and blood sampling of birds.....	15
3.1.2. Song recording.....	16
3.1.3. Behavioural observations	16
3.1.4. Perfusion of birds	16
3.2. Laboratory methods	17
3.2.1. Tissue preparation	17
3.2.2. Nissl staining	17
3.2.3. In situ hybridisation.....	18
3.2.3.1. Cloning of cDNA probes.....	18
3.2.3.2. Preparation of RNA probes	19
3.2.3.3. In situ hybridisation	19
3.2.3.4. Autoradiography	20
3.2.4. Radioimmunoassay of steroid hormone levels.....	20
3.2.4.1. Reagents	20
3.2.4.2. Extraction of steroids from plasma.....	21
3.2.4.3. Chromatography on celite micro-columns.....	21
3.2.4.4. Radioimmunoassay.....	22
3.2.4.5. Data calculation and quality controls	22
4. DUET AND SOLO SONG OF WHITE-BROWED SPARROW WEAVERS	23
4.1. Introduction	23
4.2. Methods.....	25
4.2.1. Song recordings from Zimbabwe.....	25
4.2.1.1. Recordings of the solo song of dominant males	25
4.2.1.2. Recordings of duet songs of dominant pairs	26
4.2.1.3. Song analysis.....	26
4.2.2. Song recordings from birds in captivity.....	27

4.2.2.1. Recordings of the solo song of dominant males	27
4.2.2.2. Recordings of duet songs from pairs	27
4.2.2.3. Song analysis.....	28
4.2.3. Statistical analysis	30
4.3. Results	31
4.3.1. General description of vocal behaviour.....	31
4.3.2. Solo songs of dominant males.....	31
4.3.2.1. Terminology of the solo song.....	31
4.3.2.2. Repertoire size of males from Zimbabwe	32
4.3.2.3. Repertoire size of males in captivity	34
4.3.3. Duet songs of dominant pairs	39
4.3.3.1. Terminology of the duet song.....	39
4.3.3.2. Repertoire size of pairs from Zimbabwe.....	40
4.3.3.3. Duet repertoire size of individuals estimated from three pairs in captivity	42
4.3.4. Estimates of total repertoire size of individual birds recorded in Zimbabwe inferred from studies on captive birds	48
4.3.4.1. Repertoire size of solo song.....	48
4.3.4.2. Repertoire size of duet song.....	48
4.3.4.3. Implications for the repertoire size of subordinate males.....	49
4.4. Discussion	50
4.4.1. The solo song of dominant males.....	50
4.4.1.1. Song pattern.....	50
4.4.1.2. Repertoire size.....	51
4.4.1.3. Song length.....	52
4.4.1.4. Possible functions of the solo song.....	52
4.4.2. The duet song of dominant pairs	54
4.4.2.1. Song pattern and repertoire size	54
4.4.2.2. Development of duet singing.....	55
4.4.2.3. Possible functions of the duet song	56
5. INTER- AND INTRASEXUAL DIMORPHISM IN THE SONG CONTROL SYSTEM REVEALED BY CYTOARCHITECTURE	59
5.1. Introduction	59
5.2. Materials and Methods.....	61
5.2.1. Animals.....	61
5.2.2. Tissue processing.....	61
5.2.3. Morphometric analysis	61
5.2.4. Statistical analysis	62
5.3. Results	64
5.3.1. Size of song control nuclei HVC and RA revealed from the right brain hemisphere.....	64

5.3.2. Size of song control nuclei HVC and RA revealed from both brain hemispheres.....	65
5.3.3. Telencephalon volume	66
5.3.4. Cell density and total cell number in HVC	66
5.3.5. Does the size of the song control nuclei relate to social status?	67
5.4. Discussion	70
5.4.1. Sexually dimorphic volumes of song nuclei HVC and RA	70
5.4.2. Cellular properties in HVC differ between males and females.....	72
5.4.3. Which mechanisms could drive restructuring of brain areas in subordinate males?	73
6. CHARACTERISATION OF THE SONG SYSTEM BY CYTOCHEMISTRY	77
6.1. Sexually dimorphic and status-dependent expression of AR and ER mRNA in the song control nucleus HVC	77
6.1.1. Introduction	77
6.1.2. Materials and Methods	79
6.1.2.1. Animals	79
6.1.2.2. Tissue processing	79
6.1.2.3. Morphometric analysis	79
6.1.2.4. Estimation of mRNA expression level in HVC.....	80
6.1.2.5. Statistical analysis	81
6.1.3. Results	82
6.1.3.1. Brain distribution of AR and ER mRNA	82
6.1.3.2. AR mRNA expression in dominant males and dominant females.....	86
6.1.3.3. ER mRNA expression in dominant males and dominant females	89
6.1.3.4. AR mRNA expression in males in relation to social status.....	90
6.1.3.5. ER mRNA expression in males in relation to social status	92
6.1.4. Discussion.....	94
6.1.4.1. Distribution of AR and ER mRNA in song nuclei of white-browed sparrow weavers.....	94
6.1.4.2. Comparison of the volume of AR- and Nissl-HVC in dominant males and females.....	95
6.1.4.3. Sexually dimorphic expression of AR in the song nuclei of dominant birds?.....	96
6.1.4.4. Sexually dimorphic expression of ER in the song nuclei of dominant birds?.....	98
6.1.4.5. The expression of AR and ER mRNA in relation to social status	99
6.2. Synaptic proteins as novel markers for the cytochemical characterisation of the song system – the zebra finch as model species	101
6.2.1. Introduction	101
6.2.2. Material and Methods.....	103
6.2.2.1. Animals	103

6.2.2.2. Tissue processing	104
6.2.2.3. Morphometric analysis	104
6.2.2.4. Estimation of mRNA expression level in HVC.....	105
6.2.2.5. Statistical Analysis.....	106
6.2.3. Results	106
6.2.3.1. Distribution of SNAP-25- and SPO mRNA in the songbird brain	106
6.2.3.2. Inhibition of oestrogen-producing enzyme aromatase	110
6.2.4. Discussion.....	113
6.2.4.1. SNAP-25 and SPO are differently expressed in the songbird brain.....	113
6.2.4.2. Hormonal regulation of SPO in HVC	115
6.3. The mRNA expression level of synaptic proteins in HVC of white-browed sparrow weavers	118
6.3.1. Introduction	118
6.3.2. Material and Methods.....	120
6.3.2.1. Animals	120
6.3.2.2. Tissue processing	120
6.3.2.3. Estimation of mRNA expression level in HVC.....	120
6.3.2.4. Statistical analysis	121
6.3.3. Results	121
6.3.3.1. Brain distribution of SNAP-25, SPO and STX mRNA.....	121
6.3.3.2. Expression level of SNAP-25, SPO and STX in dominant males and females	124
6.3.3.3. Expression level of SNAP-25, SPO and STX in dominant and subordinate males.....	125
6.3.3.4. Comparison of the expression level of SNAP-25, SPO and STX between dominant females and subordinate males	127
6.3.4. Discussion.....	129
6.3.4.1. Distribution of SNAP-25, SPO and STX mRNA within the song system of white-browed sparrow weavers.....	129
6.3.4.2. Expression level of SNAP-25, SPO and STX in dominant males and females	130
6.3.4.3. Expression level of SNAP-25, SPO and STX in relation to social status .	131
7. STEROID HORMONE LEVELS OF WHITE-BROWED SPARROW WEAVERS IN RELATION TO MALE SONG BEHAVIOUR AND STEROID HORMONE SENSITIVITY OF SONG CONTROL NUCLEUS HVC	133
7.1. Introduction	133
7.2. Material and Methods	134
7.2.1. Animals.....	134
7.2.2. Blood sampling.....	135
7.2.3. Radioimmunoassay of plasma levels of steroid hormones	135
7.2.4. Statistical analysis	135

7.3. Results	136
7.3.1. Plasma levels of T, DHT and E2 in dominant males and females	136
7.3.2. Plasma levels of T, DHT and E2 in relation to social status	138
7.3.3. Comparison of plasma levels of T, DHT and E2 between dominant females and subordinate males	140
7.3.4. Plasma levels of T, DHT and E2 from males of closely related species	140
7.4. Discussion	141
7.4.1. Steroid hormone levels in relation to sex	142
7.4.2. Steroid hormone levels of males in relation to status	143
7.4.3. Steroid hormone levels in relation to the steroid hormone sensitivity of the song system	145
8. TESTOSTERONE-INDUCED MALE-LIKE SOLO SONG IN FEMALE WHITE-BROWED SPARROW WEAVERS?	146
8.1. Introduction	146
8.2. Methods	148
8.2.1. Animals	148
8.2.2. Testosterone implantation	148
8.2.3. Blood sampling	148
8.2.4. Radioimmunoassay of plasma levels of steroid hormones	149
8.2.5. Song recording and analysis	149
8.3. Results	149
8.3.1. Song activity	149
8.3.2. Repertoire size and syllable structure	150
8.3.3. Song activity in relation to circulating steroid hormone levels	155
8.4. Discussion	156
8.4.1. Induction of male-like song behaviour in females	156
8.4.2. Repertoire and structure of female song	157
8.4.3. Song activity in relation to circulating hormone levels	158
9. GENERAL DISCUSSION	160
10. SUMMARY	164
11. ZUSAMMENFASSUNG	168
12. BIBLIOGRAPHY	173
13. APPENDIX	198
14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	199
CURRICULUM VITAE	201
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	202