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Physiological substrates of mammalian monogamy: The prairie vole model

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Abstract

Prairie voles (*Microtus ochrogaster*) are described here as a model system in which it is possible to examine, within the context of natural history, the proximate processes regulating the social and reproductive behaviors that characterize a monogamous social system. Neuropeptides, including oxytocin and vasopressin, and the adrenal glucocorticoid, corticosterone, have been implicated in the neural regulation of partner preferences, and in the male, vasopressin has been implicated in the induction of selective aggression toward strangers. We hypothesize here that interactions among oxytocin, vasopressin and glucocorticoids could provide substrates for dynamic changes in social and agonistic behaviors, including those required in the development and expression of monogamy. Results from research with voles suggest that the behaviors characteristics of monogamy, including social attachments and biparental care, may be modified by hormones during development and maybe regulated by different

mechanisms in males and females.



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Keywords

Prairie voles; Social behavior; Attachment; Monogamy; Oxytocin; Vasopressin; Adrenal steroids; Corticosterone; Sex differences

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