

Behavioral variation changes across an urbanization gradient in a population of great tits

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1 **Abstract :**

2 Urbanization is occurring globally at an unprecedented rate and, despite the eco-
3 evolutionary importance of individual variation in adaptive traits, we still have very
4 limited insight on how phenotypic variation is modified by anthropogenic
5 environmental change. Urbanization can increase individual differences in some
6 contexts, but whether this is generalizable to behavioral traits, which directly affect
7 how organisms interact with and respond to environmental variation, is not known.
8 Here we examine variation across three behavioral traits (breath rate, handling
9 aggression and exploration behaviour) in great tits *Parus major* along an
10 urbanization gradient (n > 1000 phenotyped individuals accross nine years) to
11 determine whether among-individual variance in behavior increases with the degree
12 of urbanization and spatial heterogeneity. Urban birds were more aggressive and

13 faster explorers than forest birds. They also displayed higher among-individual
14 variation for breath rate and aggression (1.5 and 1.8 times increase, respectively),
15 but lower among-individual variation for exploration (3.3 times decrease). Only
16 individual variation in exploration clearly changed along the continuous urbanization
17 gradient; individual differences in exploration declined with increasing impervious
18 surface area. Collectively our results suggest that individuals in the city may have
19 more diverse behavioral stress responses, yet display stronger similarity in their
20 behavioral responses to novelty. Our results suggest that generalizations about
21 urbanization's impacts on behavioral variation are not appropriate. Instead our
22 results suggest that urbanization can shape individual variation differently across
23 behavioral functions and we may expect decreased individual diversity in urban birds
24 for traits related to behavioral response to novelty.

25 **Key words: among-individual variance, city, coefficient of variation, multiple-**
26 **spatial scale, repeatability, trait variation**

27

28 **Introduction**

29 Environmental change is a widespread process that occurs naturally across
30 space and time, but humans have caused changes at an unprecedented scale and
31 speed, that pose new challenges to many organisms (Merilä, 2012; Pelletier &
32 Coltman, 2018; Vitousek et al., 1997). One of the main challenges is urbanization, *i.e.*
33 the ultimate replacement of natural landscapes by man-made infrastructures
34 (Dansereau 1957), resulting in a variety of environmental alterations, such as
35 increased noise pollution, impervious surfaces or disturbance by human presence
36 (Niemelä et al., 2011). While some organisms struggle in the face of new selective
37 pressures induced by these changes, others survive or even thrive in urban
38 environments, based on features they acquired in the past or by adjusting their
39 phenotype via individual plasticity or genetic evolution (Hendry et al., 2008; Merilä &
40 Hendry, 2014).

41

42 An increasing number of studies has documented urban-associated phenotypic
43 change in a variety of taxa and traits (*e.g.* pigmentation in Lepidoptera moths,
44 Kettlewell, 1956; beak morphology and vocal performance in house finches
45 *Haemorhous mexicanus*, Giraudeau et al., 2014; toxin tolerance in killifish, Reid et al.,
46 2016). To date, studies of urban-associated phenotypic shifts have mostly reported
47 changes in mean phenotypes. Phenotypic change can occur not only through a shift
48 in mean, but also through a shift in variation, with important implications for eco-
49 evolutionary processes in the context of urban adaptation. Indeed, phenotypic
50 variation is central to any evolutionary response to environmental change as it is the
51 prerequisite for selection to act and thus influences the direction and magnitude of
52 the response to selection. Furthermore, phenotypic variance can itself be shaped by
53 eco-evolutionary processes (*e.g.* plasticity, dispersal, (epi)genetic variation, Des
54 Roches et al., 2018; Draghi, 2019; Reed et al., 2011). In the framework of urban
55 evolutionary ecology, however, surprisingly little is known about the relationship
56 between urbanization and phenotypic variation. Recent reviews hypothesized that
57 phenotypic variation could increase in urban environments due to multiple non-
58 exclusive mechanisms (*e.g.*, limited dispersal, relaxed or heterogeneous selection,

59 increased exposure to mutagens, developmental plasticity; Capilla-Lasheras et al.,
60 2022; Thompson et al., 2022). To date, however, fewer than ten studies have
61 investigated and supported this hypothesis (*e.g.* morphology in great tit *Parus major*
62 and blue tits *Cyanistes caeruleus*; Thompson et al., 2022, life-history traits in bird
63 species globally, n=35 species; Capilla-Lasheras et al., 2022).

64

65 Animal behaviour variation has been extensively studied within the personality
66 framework (Réale et al., 2007; Sih et al., 2004; Wolf & Weissing, 2012), a growing
67 field at the intersection between wild quantitative genetics (Charmantier et al., 2014)
68 and behavioral ecology (Dingemanse & Dochtermann, 2014). Specifically, this
69 framework aims at exploring among- versus within-individual (co)variation in
70 behavioral traits, their origin, and their adaptive nature. Despite the abundant
71 studies exploring the within-species diversity in behaviour, few studies have
72 examined how urbanization affects behavioral variation (n=24, published between
73 2010 and 2022, see Burkhard, Dochtermann & Charmantier (2023) metanalysis on
74 behaviour responses to urban environments for more details). Recent attempts to
75 tackle this question have compared repeatability, *i.e.* the proportion of total
76 phenotypic variation due to among-individual variance, between urban and rural
77 populations (n=24 studies, *e.g.* Dammhahn et al., 2020; Fossett & Hyman, 2021, see
78 Burkhard, Dochtermann & Charmantier, 2023 for the complete list) For example,
79 speckled wood butterflies (*Pararge aegeria*) from urban landscapes were found to
80 be more repeatable in boldness (*i.e.* latency to approach feeder) than rural ones
81 (0.50[0.39-0.56] vs. 0.15[0.09-0.22]; Kaiser et al., 2019), which was partly explained
82 by higher among-individual variance paired with lower within-individual variance in
83 butterflies from urban landscapes. In contrast, boldness in song sparrows (*Melospiza*
84 *melodia*) did not differ between urban and rural habitats (repeatability of 0.24;
85 Fossett & Hyman, 2021), but among and within-individual variances were not
86 reported. However, the absence of differences in these repeatability ratios does not
87 imply the absence of differences in among- and within-individual variance
88 (Dochtermann & Royauté, 2019) between urban and non-urban habitats.

89

90 Differences in among-individual variance across habitats may occur if they are
91 underpinned by different genetic variances (*e.g.* due to different heterogeneous
92 selection across habitats, Barrett & Schluter, 2008; Hedrick, 1986). It may also occur
93 due to plasticity in response to the environment experienced during development
94 leading to permanent differences between individuals (*e.g.* due to different
95 exposure to stress during early life, Kristensen et al., 2018; Lazić et al., 2015;
96 Lindström, 1999; see Thompson et al., 2022 for an exhaustive review of underpinned
97 mechanisms). In the literature, urban dwellers have been shown to have higher
98 among-individual variance (*e.g.* in woodchucks (*Marmota monax*); Lehrer et al.,
99 2012 or shrews (*Crocidura russula* & *Sorex araneus*), von Merten et al., 2022). Such
100 diversity might buffer urban populations from new or fluctuating selective pressures
101 if urban individuals exploit a greater diversity of habitats and resources (Møller,
102 2010). Differences in repeatability may also result from differences in within-
103 individual variation, partly as a result of individual behavioral plasticity. In the
104 literature, most urban dwellers have greater behavioral plasticity (Dammhahn et al.,
105 2020; Hendry et al., 2008; Sol & Lefebvre, 2000), which should help them adjust
106 quickly to novel challenges in the city and, in some cases, could also hinder or
107 facilitate adaptive evolution (Caspi et al., 2022). Both among and within-individual
108 components are likely to play an important role in urban adaptation (Lowry et al.,
109 2013). In short, 1) among-individual variance is frequently established as the upper
110 limit for genetic variance, contributing to population persistence and facilitating
111 adaptive evolution (Hughes et al., 2008) and 2) within-individual variance has been
112 demonstrated to either constrain (Diamond & Martin, 2016; Huey et al., 2003) or, in
113 certain cases, facilitate evolution (Caspi et al., 2022; Levis & Pfennig, 2016), and in
114 some instances, even undergo evolutionary changes itself (Diamond et al., 2018).
115 Hence, examining how urbanization impacts behavioral variation would allow a more
116 comprehensive view on the processes that impact urban populations and their
117 evolutionary potential.

118

119 Quantifying the degree of urbanization and its impacts is both challenging and
120 crucial because sampling locations classified as urban and rural are not necessarily
121 homogeneous. Within cities for example, the amount of urbanization at sampling

122 locations can vary (*e.g.*, city center versus urban park) and cities can be highly
123 heterogeneous depending on the spatial or temporal scale considered (Mohring et
124 al., 2021; Moll et al., 2020; Strubbe et al., 2020). Therefore, the ability to detect
125 landscape effects linked to urbanization may depend on which urban locations are
126 considered (Evans et al., 2009) or the choice of appropriate spatial scale (Levin, 1992;
127 Martin, 2018). For example, urban grasshoppers were shyer than rural grasshoppers
128 only when urbanization was measured at a scale of 0.5 km, but not 3 and 5 km
129 (Waterschoot et al., 2023). Despite growing availability of remote sensing data, the
130 spatial scale at which environmental urbanization impacts organisms is rarely known
131 (Moll et al., 2020; Perrier et al., 2018; Uchida et al., 2021) and even less is known
132 about how it can influence conclusions of eco-evolutionary investigations.

133

134 Here we used a long-term monitoring study of great tits living in an urban mosaic,
135 ranging from a natural forest habitat to highly urbanized areas, to explore
136 differences in among- and within-individual variance in behaviors along an
137 urbanization gradient assessed at multiple spatial scales. In this study system, urban
138 great tits show slightly reduced gene flow compared to forest areas, with some
139 genomic evidence of local adaptation (Perrier et al., 2018) which can promote
140 differences in phenotypic variation between habitats. Previous research has shown
141 that urban great tits are more aggressive, faster explorers and have faster breath
142 rates than those from the forest (Caizergues et al., 2022), but less is known about
143 differences in variance.

144 We tested if phenotypic variance was higher in the city in these three behaviors
145 compared to the forest (P1). Throughout, we determined whether differences in
146 phenotypic variance were due to differences in among-individual variance,
147 differences in within-individual variance, or both. For most species, cities offer more
148 spatially heterogeneous territories than wild habitats (Alberti et al., 2020; Cadenasso
149 et al., 2007), which could be associated with urban selection for more diverse
150 behavioral types. Consequently, we expect that due to higher environmental
151 heterogeneity in the city for breeding great tits, we will find more among-individual
152 variance in the city (P2a) than in the forest and this will be consistent across
153 different sampling locations within the city (P2b). Finally, within the city, we expect

154 to find greater among-individual variance within sampling locations that have the
155 highest spatial heterogeneity in urbanization (P3) or that are the most urbanized (P4).
156 We did not make directional predictions regarding differences in within-individual
157 variation according to urbanization, since there are mixed findings in the literature
158 (e.g. higher within-individual variation in city, Dammhahn et al., 2020; in forest
159 Prange et al., 2004; no difference between city and forest, Sprau & Dingemanse,
160 2017).

161 **Mat & Met**

162 **Study system**

163 Great tits (*Parus major*) were monitored in southern France in La Rouvière (ROU), an
164 oak forest 20 km northwest of Montpellier that has been monitored since 1992 with
165 230 nest boxes for blue tits (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) and great tits (Blondel et al., 2006).
166 We also monitored tits at eight locations across an urbanization gradient in the city
167 of Montpellier, which includes around 247 nest boxes monitored since 2011 and
168 hosting mostly great tits (Charmantier et al., 2017; Demeyrier et al., 2016)(Figure 1).
169 During the breeding season, nest boxes were visited at least weekly to follow
170 reproduction. Adults were captured in nest boxes when feeding their 10-15 days old
171 nestlings. All nestlings and adults were individually ringed with a unique metal ring
172 provided by the French CRBPO (Centre de Recherche par le Bagueage des Populations
173 d'Oiseaux) and parents underwent behavioral assays (see below for more details).
174 Behavioral assays were performed on both forest and urban parents captured
175 between 2014 and 2022. See Table S1 for summary statistics on the traits studied.
176 All protocols were approved by the local ethics committee for animal
177 experimentation of Languedoc Roussillon (CEEA-LR. 05/06/2018) and regional
178 institutions (Prefecture decree no. 2012167-003). The captures were carried out
179 under personal ringing permits issued by the CRBPO for the research ringing
180 program number 369.

181

182 **Behavioral assays and description**

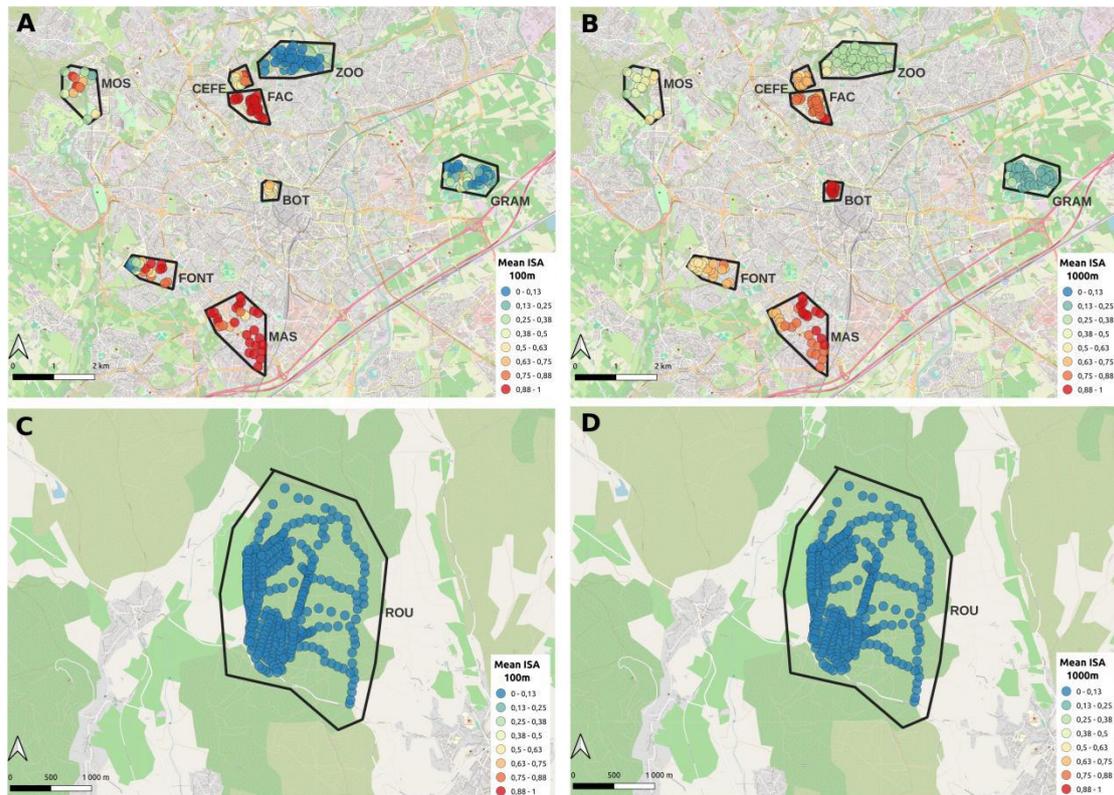
183 Once a bird was captured in its nest box, we assessed two reactions to the stress of
184 being handled. First, we immediately recorded its handling aggression (HA) score as
185 soon as we removed the bird from the nest box. The bird was handled while facing
186 away from the observer and provoked with a finger of the free hand. The observer
187 assigned a score ranging from 0 (unresponsive bird) to 3 (aggressive bird spreading
188 wings and tail) in increments of 0.5 following a standardized protocol (see FigS2A in
189 Caizergues et al., 2022 and table S1 in Dubuc-Messier et al., 2017). Immediately after
190 the HA test, the bird was isolated in a cloth bag for 5 minutes for a standardized
191 period of rest. Following these 5 minutes, the bird was removed from the bag and
192 held on its back by the handler, who measured its breath rate index (BRI). From 2013
193 to 2016, BRI was estimated as the number of chest movements during 30 seconds,
194 whereas since 2017, the protocol was updated to measure the time to complete 30
195 chest movements (Caizergues et al., 2022, Figure S2B). Measurements from 2013 to
196 2016 were therefore converted to approximate the time required to complete 30
197 chest movements to obtain the measurements on the same scale. BRI was taken
198 consecutively twice in a row and averaged across these two measures. We consider
199 breath rate index a behavioral trait because breath rate reflects both the
200 physiological function of respiration (*i.e.*, O₂ and CO₂ exchange) and respiratory
201 behaviour (*i.e.*, breath rate can be altered by classical and operant conditioning, Ley,
202 1994). BRI correlates with heart rate under restraint (Dubuc Messier et al., 2017) and
203 is often used as a proxy for acute stress response (Carere & van Oers, 2004; Krams et
204 al., 2013), with a lower BRI (and therefore faster breath rate) reflecting a greater
205 stress response. Finally, the bird underwent an open field test using an open field
206 cage with similar dimensions as in Stuber et al., (2013), to evaluate its exploration
207 behaviour in a novel environment (Caizergues et al., 2022; Stuber et al., 2013). The
208 bird was placed in an acclimation compartment adjacent to the main open-field cage
209 for 2 min before being released into the exploration room. The videos were analyzed
210 using the BORIS software (Friard & Gamba, 2016) to generate an exploration score
211 (ES) by counting the number of flights and hops during the 4 min exploration trial.
212 For a detailed protocol see Charmantier et al., (2017) and Caizergues et al., (2022),
213 figure S3. Note that these three behaviors are not correlated among or within
214 individual great tits in our populations (Caizergues et al., 2022).

215

216 **Quantification of urbanization**

217 We quantified the degree of urbanization at each nest box where at least one parent
218 was captured (N = 301) using the proportion of impervious surface area (ISA),
219 defined as sealed non-natural surfaces (*e.g.*, roads, railways, buildings), using the
220 imperviousness density raster datasets from the Copernicus on-line database
221 (resolution 10m. tiles: E38N22 & E38N23. Projection: LAEA EPSG 3035; EEA, 2020).
222 ISA has previously been shown to correlate with other urban factors such as high
223 temperature (Diamond & Martin, 2020), high noise and light pollution, low tree
224 cover, and short distance from roads (Szulkin et al., 2020). The spatial scale at which
225 environmental urbanization impacts organisms is rarely known and may vary across
226 focal traits (Uchida et al., 2021; Waterschoot et al., 2023) and so we quantified the
227 proportion of ISA around each nest box at three different spatial scales: 100, 250,
228 and 1000 meters. We chose this range to explore different effects of urbanization at
229 small, medium, and large spatial scales for great tits as they tend to have smaller
230 home ranges during breeding (approx. 60-160m, van Overveld et al., 2015; Wilkin et
231 al., 2006) but can have extensive natal dispersal (up to 900m on average in females,
232 Dingemanse et al., 2003; Garant et al., 2005; Szulkin & Sheldon, 2008). Using circular
233 radius buffers at these spatial scales in QGIS (v3.22.0; QGIS Development Team
234 2022), we counted the number of pixels associated with impervious surfaces and
235 calculated an ISA proportion index (range = 0-1. Where 1 = all ISA) around each nest
236 box by dividing by the total number of pixels within each buffer. When considering
237 all nest boxes together, the amount of urbanization correlated moderately between
238 the three spatial scales ($\rho > 0.75$), with most discrepancy at nest boxes in the
239 middle or at the edges of urban parks (Figure 1). We classified sampling locations as
240 forest if the mean ISA measurements were below 5% (ROU) and urban if they were
241 above 5% (CEF, BOT, MOS, MAS, FONT, GRAM, FAC, ZOO, Figure 1). The mean
242 proportion of ISA around each forest nest box was zero at 100 and 250 meters and
243 0.0007 at 1000 meters, while the mean proportion of ISA around each urban nest
244 box was 0.48, 0.51, and 0.53 at 100, 250, and 1000 meters, respectively, and ranged
245 from 0 to 1 (see Table S2 for more details for each sampling location and Figure 1).

246 To assess spatial heterogeneity within the city, we also calculated the within-site
247 variance of ISA (Table S2).



248

249

250 **Figure 1. Spatial map of the eight urban locations (A,B) and forest location (C,D)**
251 **and their associated proportion of urbanization at 100 m (A,C) and 1000 m (B,D)**
252 **around each nest-box in the Montpellier area, France. Each sampling location is**
253 **delineated by a black polygon. Each circle corresponds to a buffer around a nest.**
254 **Each buffer is characterized by the average proportion of ISA (i.e., impervious**
255 **surface area) where increasing urbanization moves towards red.**

256 **Statistical analysis**

257 We investigated differences in phenotypic means and variances between urban and
258 forest habitats across the three behavioral traits which are known to be repeatable,
259 not correlated, and have habitat-specific means (*i.e.*, urban vs. forest mean,
260 Caizergues et al., 2022). For each trait, we used a Bayesian generalized linear mixed
261 effects model (GLMM) that allowed the mean, among-, and within-individual
262 variances to differ between habitats (also known as heterogeneous variance model,
263 Gianola, 1986). We chose the error distribution to fit each trait, *i.e.* Gaussian for BRI,
264 threshold for HA, and Poisson for ES. We ensured that effective sample sizes for each
265 model were higher than 1000. We assessed the convergence of all parameters
266 graphically as well as using the Heidelberger and Walch test of the 'coda' package
267 (Plummer et al., 2006). Finally, we graphically controlled the residual assumptions
268 with diagnostic.mcmc from the MCMC.qpcr package (Matz et al., 2013) when
269 residuals were not fixed in the model.

270

271 *a) Comparison between city and forest*

272 To assess whether phenotypic (P_1) and among-individual variance (P_{2a}) is higher in
273 urban than forest habitats, we first ran a heterogeneous variance model with two
274 habitat categories (*i.e.*, two separate random intercepts for urban and forest groups
275 of individuals). We estimated the phenotypic mean, among-individual (V_i), annual
276 (V_y) and residual variances (V_r) for each habitat and their corresponding 95%
277 credible intervals. We included individual identity and year as random effects with
278 heterogeneous variance across random effect variances and error variance (model a).
279 For all traits we included an interaction between habitat (urban/forest) and fixed
280 effects known to influence traits: sex and age (adult vs. juveniles) (Caizergues et al.,
281 2021, 2022; Charmantier et al., 2017). The interaction between habitat and decimal
282 hour of measure was also fitted as a continuous quadratic fixed effect since
283 behaviour and metabolism can change throughout the day (Caizergues et al.,
284 2020,2022). To additionally account for possible habituation to multiple captures or
285 tests, we included assay (*i.e.*, number of previous assays) as a continuous fixed
286 effect. As the protocol for BRI changed during the study (see Caizergues et al., 2022),
287 we included protocol type as a fixed effect for this trait. Finally, for BRI and HA, we

288 accounted for among-observer variance by fitting observer identity as a random
289 effect and included heterogeneous variance for each habitat like the other random
290 effects. As among-observer variance is not biologically relevant we did not include it
291 in the total phenotypic variance estimate. Thus, we estimated the total phenotypic
292 variance for each habitat type as $V_p=V_i+V_y+V_f+V_r$, where V_f is the variance in
293 biologically relevant fixed effects only (*i.e.* sex and decimal hour of the day linked to
294 circadian rhythm, in our specific case, de Villemereuil et al., 2018).

295

296 To compare behavioral means between urban and forest birds we calculated the
297 natural logarithm of the ratio between urban and forest means as
298 $\ln RR = \log(\text{mean_urb}/\text{mean_rur})$ for each sex and age category, and its 95 % credible
299 interval. As means and variances are related in many cases, we estimated the mean-
300 standardized coefficient of variation of each variance component such that $CV =$
301 $\text{sd}(\text{variance})/\text{phenotypic trait mean}$ and its 95 % credible interval. This approach
302 allows a direct comparison of the magnitudes of variation across traits measured on
303 different scales between groups. The posterior distributions of predictions were
304 generated using the phenotypic mean across sex and age categories (table S2). To
305 compare variance between urban and forest birds, we estimated the natural
306 logarithm of the ratio between the coefficients of variations from urban and forest
307 (*i.e.* coefficient of variation ratio, $\ln CVR$, Nakagawa et al., 2014) and its 95 % credible
308 interval such that $\ln CVR = \log(CV_urb/CV_rur)$ for each variance component
309 ($\ln CVR_P$, $\ln CVR_I$, $\ln CVR_R$, $\ln CVR_F$, $\ln CVR_Y$ for total phenotypic, among-individual,
310 residual, fixed-effect, year components respectively). Traits with a higher mean or
311 variance in urban habitats will have positive $\ln RR$ and $\ln CVR$. We also estimated
312 adjusted repeatability $rpt = V_i/V_i+V_y+V_f+V_r$ and tested differences in repeatability by
313 calculating the log repeatability ratio $\ln RPT = rpt_urb/rpt_rur$ to allow comparisons
314 to similar estimates in the literature . We interpret $\ln RR$, $\ln CVR$ and $\ln RPT$ (*i.e.* effect
315 sizes) as evidence for a difference between urban and forest when 95% CI does not
316 overlap with zero.

317

318 b) Comparison across sampling locations

319 To compare whether among-individual variance at each urban sampling location was
12

320 higher than the forest location (P2b), we ran a heterogeneous variance model for
321 each trait that estimated variance components separately for each of the 9 locations
322 (model b, *i.e.*, nine separate random intercepts grouping individuals by sampling
323 location). The number of observations between sampling locations was fairly
324 balanced except for the urban CEF and BOT locations, for which we have less than 30
325 individuals (see Supplementary Table S4). The heterogeneous variance model had
326 the same structure as described for model a; we kept the same fixed effects but we
327 removed the interaction term between habitat and sex, age, and the quadratic effect
328 of decimal hour to avoid over-fitting the model. In addition, we fitted homogeneous
329 instead of heterogeneous variance structure across the year and observer random
330 effects as there was no evidence for differences in variance explained by year
331 between urban and forest habitats (HA: LNCVR_Y=-0.14[-2.06;1.89]; BRI: 1[-
332 0.66;3.83]; ES: -0.64[-3.14;2.03]) or observer (HA: LNCVR_O=-0.48 [-1.34, 0.41]; BRI: -
333 0.53 [-1.48, 0.50]). All variance components and derived values were estimated and
334 tested in the same way as outlined above.

335

336 *c) Phenotypic variance across the urban gradient*

337 Finally, to investigate whether among-individual variance within the city increased
338 with the level of spatial heterogeneity (P3) and urbanization (P4), we estimated the
339 strength and direction of the association between the mean-standardized among-
340 individual variances (CVI, from model b mentioned above) with the variance (*i.e.*,
341 spatial heterogeneity) and mean of ISA measures of each sampling location. As the
342 means and variances of ISA were on very different scales, we centered and scaled
343 them $(x - \text{mean}(x)) / \text{sd}(x)$, where x is mean or variance ISA. We focused only on
344 urban locations because preliminary analyses suggested that the forest location
345 alone drove the correlation for some traits. In addition, two locations within the city
346 had less than 30 observations and high uncertainty around the variances of model b
347 mentioned above, so we decided to exclude these locations (CEF and BOT, table S4,
348 note that conclusions were not sensitive to their inclusion) and used the remaining
349 six urban locations for this analysis. To estimate the correlation between behavioral
350 variance and ISA metrics, we ran a Bayesian regression model on the mean-

351 standardized posterior variance estimated within each iteration of model b, thus
352 generating the uncertainty around the phenotypic mean and variance components.
353 We included both mean ISA and variance ISA as fixed effects, both measured on the
354 same spatial scale. Mean and variance ISA were not colinear as the absolute values
355 of the correlations between both variables were well below 0.8 (Young, 2018)
356 ($\rho_{\text{spearman}} = -0.12$, p-value = 0.793; -0.57 , p-value = 0.15; and -0.26 , p-value = 0.53 for
357 100, 250, and 1000m scales, respectively). We used each iteration from model b to
358 run these new models (one model per iteration of model b) with the three different
359 spatial scales of ISA independently. To determine which spatial scale was most
360 relevant, we calculated the model fit by estimating Bayesian- R^2 (i.e., the variance of
361 the predicted values divided by the variance of the predicted values plus the
362 expected variance of the errors, Gelman et al., 2019) and averaged the estimates
363 across the different models generated at each spatial scale. We define here the
364 spatial scale at which the Bayesian- R^2 is the strongest as the “scale of effect” (Martin
365 & Fahrig, 2012).
366 The analyses for models a and b were conducted using the MCMCglmm package
367 (Hadfield, 2010) with uninformative priors. For our last analysis, the model was run
368 on the posterior distributions generated from the MCMCglmm (model b),
369 independently utilizing the rstanarm package (Goodrich et al., 2018), which allows
370 for linear-regression models. The analyses were performed on R version 4.3.0
371 (released on 2023-04-21).

372 Results

373 1. Birds from the city are faster explorers and more aggressive.

374

375 Urban birds were faster explorers (i.e., had higher exploration scores) than forest
376 birds regardless of sex and age (lnRR_male=0.91[0.5; 1.72]; lnRR_female=0.63[0.32;
377 1.11]; lnRR_adult=0.77[0.44; 1.29]; lnRR_juvenile=0.76[0.41; 1.27]). By contrast,
378 urban and forest birds did not significantly differ in either mean breath rate (lnRR=
379 0.04[-0.14, 0.05] across sex and age, Figure 2) or mean handling aggression
380 (lnRR_female=-0.1[-0.36; 0.19]). However, we found that handling aggression

381 response varied by sex, with urban males tending to be more aggressive than forest
382 males (i.e. credible interval slightly overlapping zero) ; $\lnRR_{\text{male}}=0.22[-0.01; 0.43]$).

383 Across urban locations, we observed consistent differences in mean behaviour
384 between urban and forest locations (i.e., effect size of the same sign), but the
385 magnitude and precision of the effect varied between sampling locations (Figure S1,
386 S2). Yet we observed a significant faster breath rate and increased handling
387 aggression at certain city locations, despite the overall trait means being similar
388 between the city and the forest (see Figure S1 and S3).

389

390 **2. City birds had higher among-individual variance in breath rate and handling** 391 **aggression but less in exploration than rural ones**

392

393 *a) Breath rate index*

394 We found no evidence that urban birds were phenotypically more variable in breath
395 rate ($\lnCVR_P=0.04[-0.06;0.16]$) than forest birds (Figure 2). This was explained by
396 urban birds having increased among-individual variance ($\lnCVR_I=0.25[0.03;0.53]$)
397 but decreased within-individual variance [$\lnCVR_R=-0.13[-0.3;0.04]$], thus balancing
398 the effect size near zero at the overall phenotypic level. As a result of this difference
399 in among-individual variance and within-individual variance, urban birds tended to
400 be more repeatable in breath rate (credible interval slightly overlapping zero;
401 $\lnRPT=0.31[-0.05;0.77]$). All other variance components were unaffected by habitat
402 (i.e. observer, fixed-effect and year variance, Table S3).

403 Our results showed varying among-individual variance among urban locations, with
404 greater (positive \lnCVR_I , in blue, Figure 3B) and lower (negative \lnCVR_I , in red,
405 Figure 3A) variance depending on which urban locations were compared to the
406 forest. While the overall trend across city and forest (model a) indicated higher
407 among-individual variance for the city, two of the eight urban locations exhibited
408 lower among-individual variance, although the credible interval overlapped zero
409 ($\lnCVR_I=-0.19 [-2.05; 0.5]$ and $-0.38 [-2.56; 0.6]$, for MOS and CEF, respectively). All
410 others urban locations had higher among-individual variance (though the credible

411 interval overlapped zero for ZOO, MAS and BOT, figure S1). Despite the expectation
412 of greater among-individual variance for more urbanized locations (P4), no
413 consistent pattern was observed in this direction for the breath rate index. For
414 instance, MAS and MOS, which are more urbanized than FONT and GRAM,
415 respectively (all spatial scales confounded - Table S2), displayed lower among-
416 individual variance. Additionally, CEF and FONT, with similar levels of average
417 urbanization (all spatial scales confounded, Table S2), exhibited different among-
418 individual variance. Finally, we observed both greater and lower within-individual
419 variation (positive or negative $\ln\text{CVR}_R$) depending on which urban locations were
420 compared to the forest, with no apparent pattern (Figure 3A, upper triangle). See
421 figure S4A,B,C for detailed estimates related to Figure 3.

422 b) *Handling aggression*

423 Urban birds were 1.28 times more phenotypically variable in their handling
424 aggression ($\ln\text{CVR}_P=0.25[0.15;0.35]$) than forest birds. This was in part attributed to
425 urban birds having 1.5 times more among-individual variance
426 ($\ln\text{CVR}_I=0.41[0.1;0.71]$) and 2.53 times more variance attributed to sex, age, and
427 decimal hour ($\ln\text{CVR}_F=0.93[0.2;1.81]$). It was not possible to assess whether
428 differences in phenotypic variance could also be due to differences in within-
429 individual variation as this component cannot be estimated in a threshold model.
430 Consistent with the higher among-individual variance, there was evidence that urban
431 birds were more repeatable in handling aggression ($\ln\text{RPT}=0.48[0.2;0.83]$). All other
432 variance components remained unchanged (Table S3).

433 Accounting for between-sampling location variation (model b), all urban sites except
434 CEF ($\ln\text{CVR}_I=-0.17[-0.97; 0.07]$) exhibited higher among-individual variance than the
435 forest (*i.e.*, higher $\ln\text{CVR}_I$, blue tiles in Figure 3B). The comparison within the city did
436 not reveal a clear pattern due to a lot of heterogeneity in the sign of $\ln\text{CVR}_I$ (red,
437 white, and blue tiles in Figure 3B, lower triangle) and a considerable amount of
438 uncertainty around the effect size.

439

440 c) *Exploration score*

441 Results for the exploration score were opposite to our predictions for phenotypic
442 variance (P1) and to the patterns found for the first two behaviors. Phenotypic
443 variance for exploration was 2.8 time lower in city than in forest birds (lnCVR_P=-
444 1.03[-1.19;-0.88]). The reduced phenotypic variance variability in exploration among
445 urban birds was explained by urban birds having 3.3 times less among-individual
446 variance (lnCVR_I=-1.2[-1.63;-0.8]) and 1.15 times less variance due to sex, age, and
447 decimal hour (lnCVR_f=-0.14[-0.36;0.02]). There was no evidence of a difference in
448 within-individual variance (lnCVR_R=0.21[-0.16;0.66]) across habitats. Finally,
449 consistent with the lower among-individual variance, there was evidence that urban
450 birds were less repeatable in exploration (lnRPT=-0.24[-0.45;-0.06]). The variance
451 due to the year effect remained unchanged (Table S3).

452 When we compared the urban locations one by one, we found that all eight urban
453 locations exhibited less among-individual variance than the forest location. Across
454 urban locations, the patterns of effect size for among-individual variance and within-
455 individual variation differences were quite homogeneous (all of the same sign within
456 each triangle, aka same colour) (Figure 3C, upper and lower triangle, respectively).

457

458 **3. Among-individual variance correlates with urbanization gradient for exploration** 459 **but not for stress-related behaviors.**

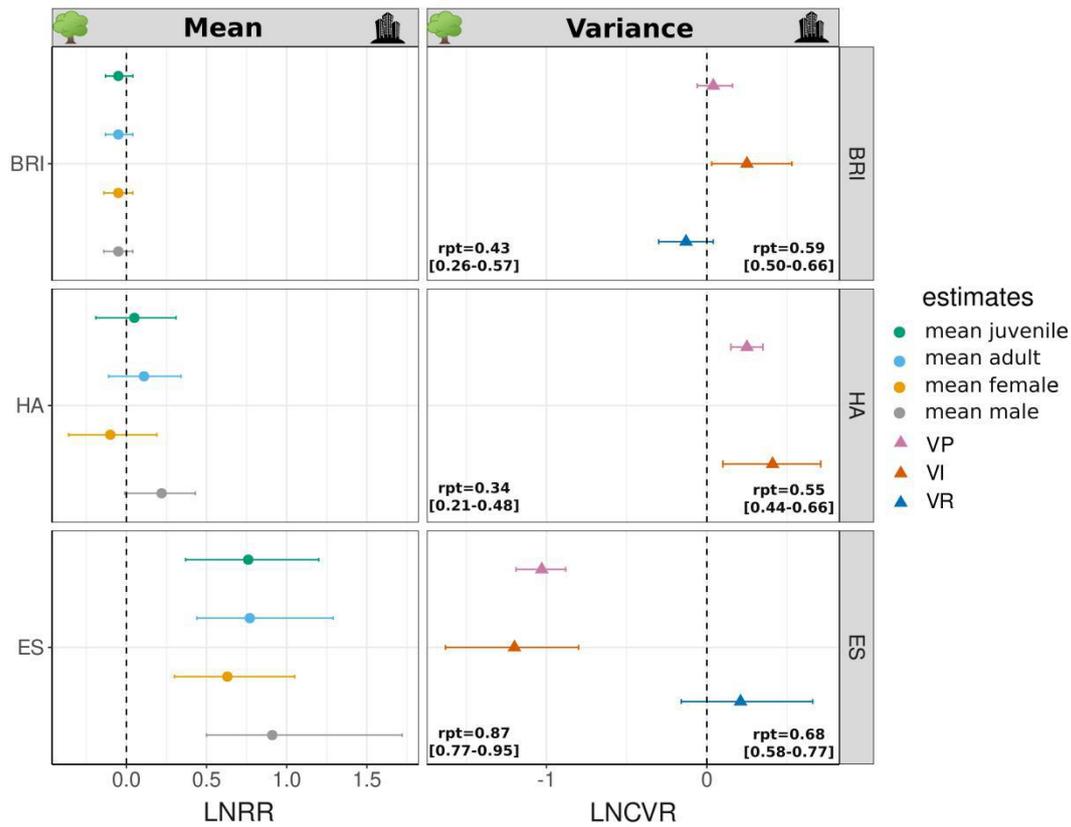
460 When using different spatial scales to estimate the proportion of ISA around each
461 nest-box, the locations classification changed depending on the spatial scale
462 considered (see Figure 1, Table S2). For instance, the botanical garden (BOT) was one
463 of the most urbanized locations (*i.e.*, highest level of mean ISA) at the 1000-m scale
464 (ISA=0.93), but had intermediate levels of urbanization at the 100-m scale (ISA=0.56)
465 because it is a small green haven in the center of town. An examination of which
466 spatial scale of urbanization explained the most variation in among-individual
467 variance (*i.e.*, scale of effect) showed heterogeneous results across traits leading to
468 interesting insight into the relevant scale for each trait. The scale of effect was 250 m
469 for breath rate index (R-squared=0.31), 100 m for handling aggression (R-squared=
470 0.48), and 1000 meters for exploration score (Rsq=0.63) (Figure S5). Note that

471 although 250 m for the breathing rate index had the highest Bayesian R-squared, 100
472 and 1000 m were very close (R-squared=0.28 and 0.29 respectively). We will only
473 present the following results for the corresponding scale effect (see Figure S5 for the
474 other scales).

475 Contrary to our prediction (P3), we found no clear evidence for greater among-
476 individual variance within urban environments that are more spatially
477 heterogeneous in terms of urbanization (*i.e.*, variance in ISA). There was no evidence
478 for greater among-individual variance in BRI and HA in environments with higher
479 levels of urbanization (P4, mean ISA, $\beta_{\text{meanISA}}=0.01[-0.03;0.06]$ and $0.02[-0.05;0.11]$,
480 respectively) or greater spatial heterogeneity ($\beta_{\text{varianceISA}}=0.01[-0.006;0.03]$ and $0.07[-$
481 $0.02;0.20]$, respectively, Figure 4A,B and S4A, S4B). In contrast, we found that
482 among-individual variance in exploration score decreased linearly with more
483 urbanized areas within the city (with higher ISA) ($\beta_{\text{meanISA}}=-0.12[-0.23;-0.004]$, Figure
484 4C and figure S4C), but there was no evidence of a correlation with spatial
485 heterogeneity ($\beta_{\text{varianceISA}}=-0.07[-0.17;0.07]$). Note that the direction of the
486 relationship between among-individual variance and spatial heterogeneity varied
487 depending on the spatial scale analyzed. It changed from positive at small and
488 medium scales to negative at large scales for both the breath rate index and
489 exploration (see Figure S4)

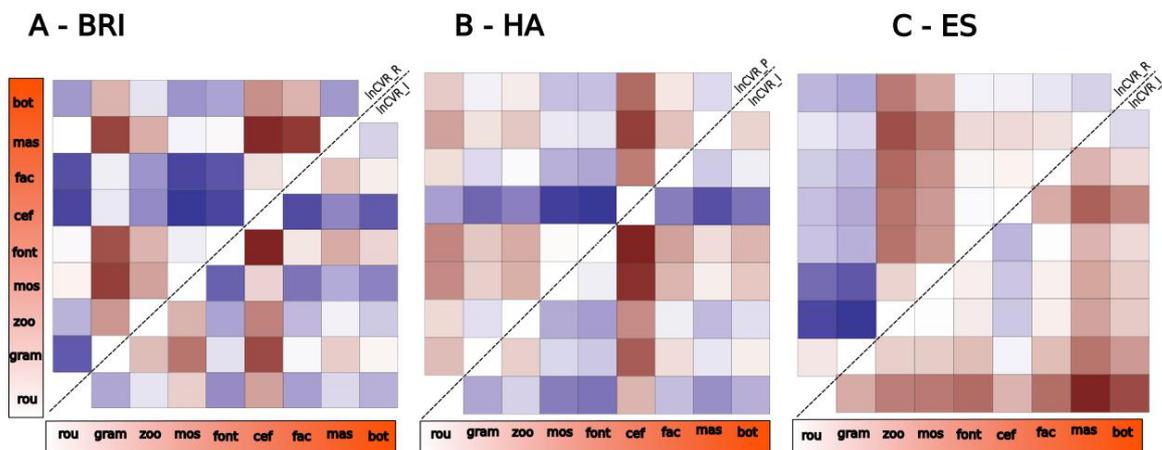
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492

493 **Figure 2. Log-response ratio (LnRR), log-coefficient variance ratio (LnCVR) and their**
 494 **95% credible interval for behavioral traits (BRI: Breath Rate Index, HA: handling**
 495 **aggression, ES : Exploration score) in great tits in forest vs.. urban environment**
 496 **Montpellier area.** Traits have a higher mean (LnRR) or are more variable (higher
 497 LnCVR) in urban habitats when estimates are positive (*i.e.*, right of the zero dashed
 498 line). Rpt corresponds to the repeatability and the 95% credible interval for the
 499 urban (on the right) and forest (on the left) habitat. Dots and triangles represent the
 500 mean of the posteriors distributions for LnRR and LnCVR respectively.

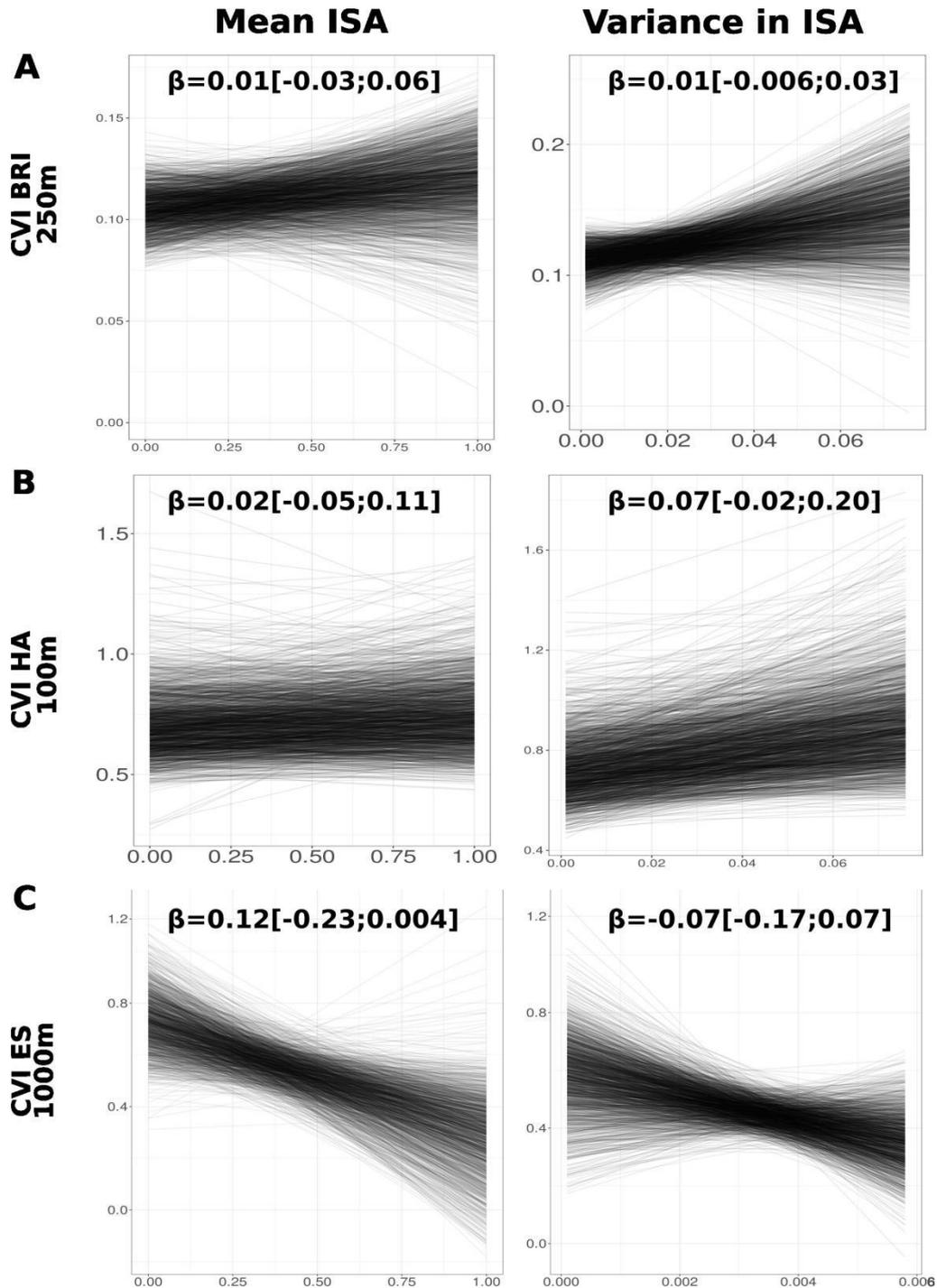


501

502 **Figure 3. Pattern of pairwise log-coefficient variance ratio (LnCVR) for breath rate**
 503 **index BRI (A), handling aggression HA (B) and exploration score ES (C) between the**
 504 **9 locations of the study system.** The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA
 505 (buffer 1000m), which is also represented in an orange gradient, with dark orange

506 indicating higher levels of ISA. InCVR for within individual variance (InCVR_R) is
 507 above the diagonal while InCVR for among-individual variance (InCVR_I) is below the
 508 diagonal. Note that for HA, we represented InCVR for total phenotypic variance
 509 (InCVR_P) as the threshold model does not estimate residual variance. Positive, zero
 510 and negative InCVR are shown in blue, white and red respectively. A positive (blue)
 511 value means that the location on the x-axis has a greater coefficient of variation (and
 512 so associated variance) than the location on the y-axis. See the supplementary
 513 materials to have access to all the values.

514



515

516 **Figure 4. Relationship between predicted mean-standardized among-individual**
517 **variance (CVI) and mean ISA (on the left), variance ISA (on the right) for Breath**
518 **Rate Index (BRI, A), Handling aggression (HA, B) and exploration score (ES, C) and**
519 **their corresponding «scale effect».** CVI used here are estimated from the posteriors
520 distributions of model b. Each line represents the predictions of one Bayesian model
521 (one model per iteration of model b). Note that CVI are expressed on the latent-scale
522 for HA and ES. β is the coefficient of relation between mean/variance ISA among-
523 individual variance (CVI).

524 Discussion

525

526 Recent work has demonstrated that phenotypic variance across individuals, the raw
527 material for selection, may be higher in urban populations than non-urban ones in
528 some contexts (Thompson et al., 2022, Capilla-Lasheras et al., 2022 but see Burkhard,
529 Dochtermann & Charmantier, 2023 Sanderson et al., 2022). We examined if urban
530 populations contained more behavioral variation (P1) and whether this was due to
531 higher among-individual variance (*i.e.*, between individual differences, P2a, P2b). We
532 find that urban birds are faster explorer and more aggressive than forest birds. In
533 addition urban birds are more variable than forest birds for breath rate and handling
534 aggression, but less variable in their exploration of a novel environment. These
535 results are fairly robust when examining behavioral variation at each urban sampling
536 location compared to the forest, but also highlighted differences among urban
537 locations in the individual diversity they contained, which is especially evident for
538 breath rate. Finally, we find decreasing individual heterogeneity in exploration with
539 increasing urbanization in the city, but no support for linear relationships between
540 increasing urbanization and individual differences for the other behavioral traits.
541 Collectively our results suggest that individuals in the city may have more diverse
542 behavioral stress responses, yet display stronger similarity in their behavioral
543 responses to novelty.

544

545 Behavioral differences between city and forest

546

547 In agreement with previous findings (Charmantier et al., 2017, Caizergues et al.,
548 2022), we confirm that birds in urban areas are faster explorers than conspecifics

549 living in the forest, and we also find a trend that males in urban areas are more
550 aggressive. Although we find faster urban breath rates as in Caizergues et al., (2022),
551 the uncertainty around the estimates are larger and do not allow us to conclude on a
552 significant difference. Such disparity in the magnitude and uncertainty of effect sizes
553 between the two studies could be explained by 1) the use of different fixed effects
554 and 2) the use of heterogeneous variance structures (one intercept and variance per
555 location). Interestingly, there is clear evidence of faster breath rate at three urban
556 sites (GRAM, ZOO and FONT, Fig S1) and so our results suggest that different
557 environmental conditions among sampling locations within a city can drive stronger
558 differences in breath rate means. In the literature, this trait has conflicting patterns
559 with urbanization, with some studies showing that birds breathe faster in the city
560 (Caizergues et al., 2022, Torné-Noguera et al., 2014), while others show no
561 difference (Abolins-Abols et al., 2016; Senar et al., 2017). Given our findings, these
562 discrepancies could result from non-accounted for habitat heterogeneity within
563 urban and forest habitats (e.g. human disturbance, food and predator abundance).
564 Further studies that account for environmental heterogeneity at multiple spatial
565 scales are needed to understand whether it might alter our interpretation of the
566 urbanization effect on average traits.

567

568 **Higher among-individual variation in two urban behaviors**

569

570 While earlier studies found higher phenotypic variance in life-history and
571 morphological traits among urban versus non-urban birds (Thompson et al., 2022;
572 Capilla-Lasheras et al., 2022), our present study reveals increased phenotypic
573 variance (P1) exclusively in one behavioral trait—handling aggression. Inconsistent
574 support for P1 across traits aligns with Sanderson et al.'s (2023) recent findings that
575 human-related disturbances can both increase and decrease phenotypic variation
576 across different trait types. Consistent with our second prediction, we find higher
577 among-individual variance (P2a) in urban habitats for breath rate and handling
578 aggression, which translates into higher urban repeatability. Previous studies on
579 great tits showed contrasting patterns with both higher (Charmantier et al., 2017)
580 and lower (Hardman & Dalesman, 2018) repeatability of handling aggression for
22

581 urban compared to forest populations. However, these studies did not report
582 variance estimates and thus did not conclude on whether changes in repeatability
583 were due to higher or lower among-individual variance. Burkhard, Dochtermann &
584 Charmantier (2023) only found seven studies testing explicitly for differences in
585 behavioral variance at the among- and within-individual levels between urban and
586 non-urban environments in other birds and mammals species for behavioral traits
587 (Bokony et al., 2012; Kaiser et al., 2019; Lehrer et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2018;
588 von Merten et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2020). For aggressive behaviour, only one
589 study had reported differences in among-individual variance in an urbanization
590 context (Von Merten et al., 2022, in shrews), where they showed higher repeatability
591 due to higher among-individual variance in urban shrews, consistent with our results.
592 Our results illustrate that examining among- and within-individual variance
593 component, that have different eco-evolutionary implications, can be critical to
594 reveal differences that might otherwise remain cryptic. For example, higher among-
595 and lower within-individual variation in urban breath rates (Fig 2B) contribute to
596 similar amounts of total phenotypic variation between the city and forest. This could
597 suggest that variance is shaped by different processes in the city, *e.g.*, less plasticity
598 in breath rates in the city than the forest, an inference that would be missed if not
599 evaluating among and within- individual variance separately.

600 While high among-individual variance in behaviour is often associated with increased
601 population stability and resilience (Wolf & Weissing, 2012), it is important to note
602 that for this to hold true, among-individual variance should partly include genetic
603 variance, which is vital for adaptive evolution and long-term population persistence
604 (Barrett & Schluter, 2008). The greater among-individual variance we find in the city
605 can be underpinned by genetic variance in response to relaxed or fluctuating
606 selection or by developmental plasticity in response to spatial environmental
607 heterogeneity (Wolf & Weissing 2010). Studies comparing urban and forest great tit
608 genomes found evidence of differences in genes (Perrier et al., 2018; Riyahi et al.,
609 2017), in DNA methylation (Caizergues, Le Luyer, et al., 2022; Riyahi et al., 2015), or
610 expression of genes (Watson et al., 2017) that are inextricably linked to behaviour
611 (*e.g.*, genes linked to the nervous system and stress responses). Specifically,
612 urbanization has been repeatedly associated with shifts in allele frequencies in the
23

613 SERT gene (Mueller et al., 2013; van Dongen et al., 2015) which affects a wide
614 diversity of behavioral traits such as stress sensitivity and handling aggression in
615 great tits (Craig & Halton, 2009; Savitz & Ramesar, 2004), but also in other bird and
616 mammals species (Grunst et al., 2021, Mueller et al., 2013, 2020 ,Savitz & Ramesar,
617 2004). In our study system, reduced genomic diversity was found in the most
618 urbanized locations and genetic differentiation increased with urbanization
619 differences (maximum $F_{ST}=0.009$, Perrier et al., 2018) suggesting that the high
620 among-individual variance we uncovered for aggression and breath rate in the city
621 may not necessarily comprise high among-individual genetic variation (Yates et al.,
622 2019). While they are difficult to implement in vertebrates, common garden and
623 quantitative genetic (genomic) approaches may be the most useful opportunities to
624 uncover the mechanisms underpinning trait variation and further understand how
625 urbanization impacts the ability of species to persist and evolve (Schell, 2018).

626

627 **Higher homogeneity in exploration among urban birds**

628

629 Contrary to our predictions P1, P2a and P4 we find that urban birds exhibit both
630 lower phenotypic and among-individual variance in exploration compared to forest
631 birds (Fig 2D). Exploration is closely linked to resource acquisition and risk avoidance
632 (Toscano et al., 2016) and faster explorers have been shown to be better at
633 detecting environmental cues associated with resources (in blue tits, Delaitre et al.,
634 *unpublished*). It suggests that urban birds might employ less diverse strategies for
635 resource acquisition and predator avoidance in the city. While there is evidence in
636 the literature that urban individuals tend to be more homogeneous in predator
637 avoidance behaviors (Geffroy et al., 2020) and that the repeatability of exploration is
638 lower in urban great tits (Charmantier et al., 2017) and house finches (Weaver et al.,
639 2019), it is unknown whether there are consequences for intra-specific competition,
640 predation, or even demography (Araújo et al., 2011; Bolnick et al., 2003). A reduction
641 in among-individual variance is hypothesized to have consequences for population
642 viability, as it may render the population vulnerable to new or fluctuating selective
643 pressures due to individuals exploiting a smaller diversity of habitats and resources

644 (Møller, 2010). However, fast exploring great tits (such as urban birds in our study
645 system) have been shown to adjust their behaviour more rapidly in response to
646 changes in food resources and find new food resources more quickly than their
647 slower counterparts (Coomes et al., 2022; van Overveld & Matthysen, 2009). In the
648 literature there are conflicting hypotheses linking plasticity to the fast-slow
649 exploration continuum. While the behavioral flexibility hypothesis predicts that fast
650 explorers are less behaviorally flexible (forming routine-like behaviour and taking
651 more time to adjust; Coppens et al., 2010; Logan, 2016; Mazza et al., 2018), the
652 information gathering hypothesis predicts the opposite where higher sampling
653 behaviors allow more rapid responses; Arvidsson & Matthysen, 2016; Herborn et al.,
654 2014; Rojas-Ferrer et al., 2020). Further studies would be needed to investigate
655 whether urban individuals, in our study system, could adjust to environmental
656 conditions as a result of individual differences in plasticity despite low among-
657 individual variance in average behaviour.

658

659 Lower total phenotypic variation and among-individual variance in exploration of
660 urban birds could partly be a consequence of genetic diversity loss. While we did not
661 investigate differences in genetic variation for this trait among habitats, exploration
662 has been shown to harbour genetic variance for some species (*e.g.* Careau et al.,
663 2009 in deer mice, *Peromyscus maniculatus*, Dingemanse et al., 2012 in stickleback
664 *Gasterosteus aculeatus*) including great tits (Drent et al., 2003, Dingemanse et al.,
665 2002), so we could hypothesize that some of the differences we found arise from
666 differences in genetic variance across habitats. However, given we do not see
667 consistent patterns of variation along the urbanization gradient across all the
668 behavioral traits, it is likely that other mechanisms such as matching habitat choice
669 (Edelaar et al., 2017) or plasticity explain reduced individual diversity of exploration
670 in more urbanized contexts. For example, urban individuals could plastically adjust to
671 novel stimuli in the same direction through habituation (as shown in blue-tailed
672 skinks, Williams et al., 2021) and, in our novel environment assay, urban tits may
673 similarly reduce responses to novelty and explore more quickly while forests tits may
674 have shown more varied exploration responses. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis
675 suggests that decreases in phenotypic variation in human-disturbed habitats may be
25

676 more common for behavioral traits (Sanderson et al., 2023), which would support
677 this alternative explanation.

678 ***Mean urbanization, not spatial heterogeneity, influences among-individual***
679 ***variation in exploration***

680 Our measure of impervious surface assessed at three different spatial scales,
681 illustrated how locations within the same city are characterized by different levels of
682 impervious surface (*i.e.* proxy for urbanization) (Table S2). The ordering of locations
683 by urbanization intensity depends on the spatial scales considered (*e.g.*, FAC is the
684 most urbanized at 100 m, but BOT is the most urbanized at 1000 m). Such
685 heterogeneity in urbanization metrics within a single city may explain why our ability
686 to detect urbanization effects depends on the specific urban locations considered
687 (Evans et al., 2009). Differences in behavioral variation for the same trait among our
688 urban sampling locations highlights a need to examine variation at finer spatial
689 scales within cities and investigate other unmeasured environmental or ecological
690 features (*e.g.*, native and non-native tree composition; Jensen et al., 2023) that may
691 drive heterogeneity in phenotypic variation across the urban matrix. Note that the
692 historical nest box set-up in our focal locations was not optimal to explore such
693 heterogeneity since we only had one fairly homogeneous forest location versus
694 multiple urban locations. Hence, going beyond analyzing overall variation in the city
695 and estimating variation at finer scales was a crucial step. While differences in trait
696 variation between city and forest can not be solely attributed to the effect of
697 urbanization, the urban gradient approach allows for a more comprehensive
698 exploration of the effects of urbanization proxies. For instance, our findings illustrate
699 that the average impervious surface partially explains the reduction in among-
700 individual variance in great tit exploration within the urban environment (Fig 4C). By
701 combining multiple approaches (city vs. forest, location heterogeneity and
702 urbanization gradient), we show inconsistencies among these approaches for breath
703 rate and handling aggression but robust conclusions across the approaches for
704 exploration. For example, there are higher urban individual differences for breath
705 rate and handling aggression when comparing urban and forest habitat categories,
706 but there are no strong relationships between individual variation in these behaviors

707 across the urbanization gradient. This highlights the value of incorporating at least
708 two different approaches to comprehensively understand effects of urbanization on
709 wild populations.

710

711 Recent studies suggest that higher among-individual variance in behavior should be
712 favored in environments with greater spatial heterogeneity as it would allow the
713 exploitation of more diverse resources or niches (Montiglio et al., 2013; Pamela
714 Delarue et al., 2015; von Merten et al., 2022). Partly in line with these studies and
715 our prediction P2a, we find greater among-individual variance for breath rate and
716 handling aggression in the city than in the forest, although we could not
717 demonstrate that this was related to spatial heterogeneity in impervious surface (P3).
718 This is surprising given that previous research has demonstrated a positive
719 association between trait variance and land cover spatial heterogeneity within cities,
720 particularly for life-history traits in great tits (Capilla-Lasheras et al., 2022). One
721 limitation of our study is that we do not account for non-linear relationships
722 between mean and spatial heterogeneity in impervious surface. Locations with
723 extreme proportions of impervious surface (0 or 1) inherently exhibit less variability
724 in their impervious surface cover. In contrast, two locations with an intermediate
725 level of imperviousness has more variation in the spatial distribution of impervious
726 surfaces. For example in our study system, CEF and FONT have the same average
727 percentage of impervious surface (*i.e.* 70%), but the variability in impervious surface
728 is 50 times higher in FONT. Under these conditions, if we hypothesize that among-
729 individual variance in behavior is influenced by spatial heterogeneity, we might
730 expect lower among-individual variance at the extremes of the urban gradient and
731 higher among-individual variance in the middle. While a more suitable approach
732 would involve using an independent, more integrative, and continuous measure of
733 spatial heterogeneity (*e.g.*, Simpson diversity of land cover), it is not feasible to
734 assess this at smaller spatial resolutions in our study system. Another limitation of
735 our study is that in our study system, birds occupy urban locations with high spatial
736 variability in human disturbances, such as pedestrian frequency, car and tramway
737 density, or air and light pollution. This high variability in urban stressors could

738 influence the diversity of behavioral stress responses among urban tits, but these
739 stressors may not correlate strongly to impervious surface. Exploring these other
740 dimensions of the urban matrix would be particularly useful to identify which urban
741 environmental features shape variation in different avian behaviors (Alberti et al.,
742 2020; Rivkin et al., 2019; Szulkin et al., 2020).

743

744 **Behaviors are influenced by the environment at different spatial scales**

745

746 The spatial scale that urbanization affects organisms is an important yet still
747 overlooked issue (Moll et al., 2020), while the increasing availability of remote
748 sensing data provides a great opportunity to extract environmental heterogeneity at
749 multiple scales (Kuenzer et al., 2014). The urbanization gradient approach applied at
750 multiple scales highlights that the most relevant spatial scale for the effect of
751 urbanization (*i.e.* scale of effect) is dependent on the trait studied (Capilla-Lasheras
752 et al., 2022; Martin, 2018; Waterschoot et al., 2023). The «scale of effect» for
753 exploration was a buffer radius of 1000 meters, which aligns with great tits exploring
754 and foraging at large spatial scales around their nest (approximately 3,500-4,000 m²,
755 95% KDE density, according to Naef-Daenzer, 2000). In contrast, the «scale of effect»
756 for stress-related behaviors reflected more local impacts of the environment on
757 breath rate (250 m) and handling aggression (100 m). Similar results have been
758 shown in blue tits, where average exploration and handling aggression were
759 influenced by large and small scale ecological conditions respectively (Dubuc-Messier
760 et al., 2017). The use of remote sensing data opens an exciting avenue for
761 investigating the different temporal and spatial scale effects of urban-driven
762 evolutionary processes, while providing standardized environmental metrics that
763 allow comparison of effect sizes across studies (Szulkin et al., 2020).

764

765 ***Conclusion and perspectives***

766 This study aimed at exploring the impacts of urbanization on both the total
767 phenotypic and among-individual variance for three behavioral traits. Higher among-
768 individual variance may enhance a population's ecological success, as demonstrated

769 by studies indicating that populations with greater diversity are less susceptible to
770 environmental changes, more demographically stable, more successful in colonizing
771 new environments, and less prone to extinction compared to less variable
772 populations (Forsman & Wennersten, 2016). Our findings present a contrasting
773 scenario wherein urban birds exhibited higher among-individual variance in stress-
774 related behaviors but lower diversity in novelty-related exploration compared to
775 forest birds. This suggests that urban great tit populations may possess the ability to
776 quickly adapt to changes in stressors, such as human disturbance, albeit adaptation
777 could be slowed down and countered by a low diversity of exploration strategies.
778 While among-individual variance is frequently regarded as the upper limit for genetic
779 variance, additional studies are necessary to examine whether cities contain
780 populations with higher genetic variance or, alternatively, higher individual variation
781 in plasticity. This will be essential to fully comprehend whether wild populations can
782 continue to thrive in a context of increasing global urbanization.

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Supplementary files

Table S1. Summary statistics on the raw data for three behavioral traits analysed in this study

Traits	Metrics	Urban	Forest
Breath rate index	Number of individuals	760	299
	Number of observations	1089	386
	Mean number of obs/individual	1.53	1.31
	Raw Phenotypic mean (sd)	13.44 (2.23)	14.14 (2.23)
Handling aggression	Number of individuals	855	434
	Number of observations	1327	776
	Mean number of obs/individual	1.61	1.77
	Raw phenotypic mean (sd)	1.75 (1.09)	1.73(0.97)
Exploration	Number of individuals	529	193

score	Number of observations	679	227
	Mean number of obs/individual	1.35	1.25
	Raw Phenotypic mean (sd)	60.32 (62.52)	31.51 (51.56)

Table S2 - Predicted phenotypic mean per location and their associated 95% credible interval. Model accounted for sex, age, number of captures, decimal hour of measure and methodological fixed-effects (see methods for more details). Locations are ordered by ascending proportion of urbanization within a 1000-metre buffer around the nest.

Locations	Breath rate index	Handling aggression	Exploration Score
ROU	14.10 [13.61, 14.65]	3.06 [1.60, 4.73]	1.56 [1.17, 1.98]
GRAM	13.30 [12.67, 13.85]	3.72 [2.14, 5.53]	2.32 [1.92, 2.75]
ZOO	13.60 [13.07, 14.16]	3.13 [1.55, 4.82]	3.22 [2.93, 3.52]
MOS	13.82 [13.09, 14.44]	3.33 [1.82, 5.32]	3.31 [2.81, 3.74]
FONT	12.86 [12.24, 13.61]	3.84 [2.18, 5.81]	3.08 [2.64, 3.44]
CEF	13.79 [12.90, 14.63]	4.42 [2.21, 7.37]	2.94 [0.40, 4.81]
FAC	13.75 [12.92, 14.52]	4.15 [2.33, 6.18]	3.37 [2.81, 3.99]
MAS	13.74 [13.15, 14.38]	3.55 [2.15, 5.55]	3.54 [3.21, 3.87]
BOT	13.79 [12.54, 14.92]	3.74 [1.77, 6.19]	3.41 [2.48, 4.36]

Table S3. Mean and variance of proportion of impervious surface area (ISA) at 100, 250 and 1000 meters per sampling location (1 rural location ROU and 8 urban locations). Locations are ordered by ascending proportion of urbanization within a 1000-metre buffer around the nest.

Locations	100 meters		250 meters		1000 meters	
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
ROU	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
GRAM	0.177	0.028	0.171	0.017	0.185	0.002
ZOO	0.049	0.002	0.092	0.005	0.303	0.003
MOS	0.565	0.07	0.547	0.026	0.499	0.003
FONT	0.61	0.09	0.682	0.05	0.633	0.005
CEF	0.669	0.025	0.709	0.001	0.671	0.001
FAC	0.975	0.001	0.931	0.002	0.826	0.001
MAS	0.903	0.022	0.9	0.005	0.83	0.005
BOT	0.557	0.008	0.818	0.000	0.933	0.000

Table S4. Repeatability (rpt), variance components, predicted trait mean and their 95% credible interval for breath rate index, handling aggression and exploration score. For handling aggression, the residual variance is fixed to one due to the family distribution of the model.

metric	habitat	Breath rate index	Handling aggression	Exploration Score
rpt	urban	0.59[0.50-0.66]	0.55[0.441-0.655]	0.68[0.58-0.77]
rpt	forest	0.43[0.26-0.57]	0.34[0.21-0.483]	0.87[0.766-0.951]
Vp	urban	4.892[4.301-5.657]	2.611[1.906-3.445]	3.019[2.57-3.546]
Vp	forest	4.500[3.784-5.222]	1.646[1.283-2.088]	6.498[4.783-8.29]
Vy	urban	0.346[0.04-0.852]	2.782[1.984-3.631]	0.125[0-0.394]
Vy	forest	0.109[0-0.440]	1.670[1.293-2.108]	0.170[0-0.680]
Vf	urban	0.021[0-0.052]	0.059[0-0.178]	0.010[0-0.032]
Vf	forest	0.046[0-0.125]	0.065[0-0.201]	0.098[0-0.287]
Vi	urban	2.864[2.39-3.369]	0.171[0.078-0.276]	2.061[1.636-2.492]
Vi	forest	1.927[1.066-2.665]	0.025[0.001-0.054]	5.652[4.018-7.44]
Vr	urban	1.661[1.399-1.915]	Fixed to 1	0.822[0.609-1.086]
Vr	forest	2.418[1.797-3.112]	Fixed to 1	0.578[0.221-1.075]
Predicted mean	urban	13.47[12.79, 14.08]	1.97[1.56, 2.44]	3.12 [2.83, 3.43]
Predicted mean	forest	14.20[13.26, 15.17]	1.80[1.37, 2.25]	1.55 [1.06, 2.02]

Table S5. Number of observations per location (9 locations) and sex for each traits BRI (Breath rate index), HA (Handling aggression) and ES (Exploration score). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA (buffer 1000m).

	rou	gram	zoo	mos	font	cef	fac	mas	bot

BRI female	238	115	178	45	79	14	49	81	11
BRI male	148	103	163	41	69	11	39	81	10
HA female	409	137	188	69	101	14	60	100	15
HA male	367	132	209	61	95	10	50	101	13
ES female	128	77	95	35	48	6	25	60	7
ES male	99	69	94	31	42	4	20	60	6

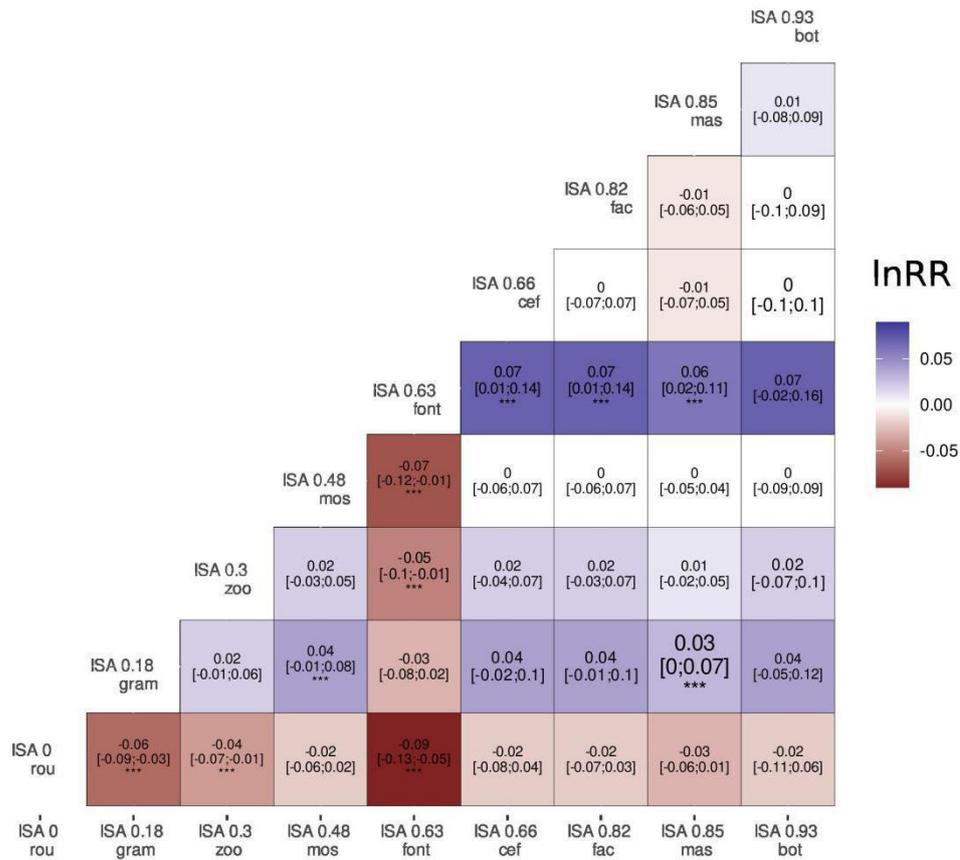


Figure S1. Pairwise log response ratio (InRR) and their 95% credible interval for Breath Rate Index between the 9 locations of the study system (and their corresponding 1000 metres ISA). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA

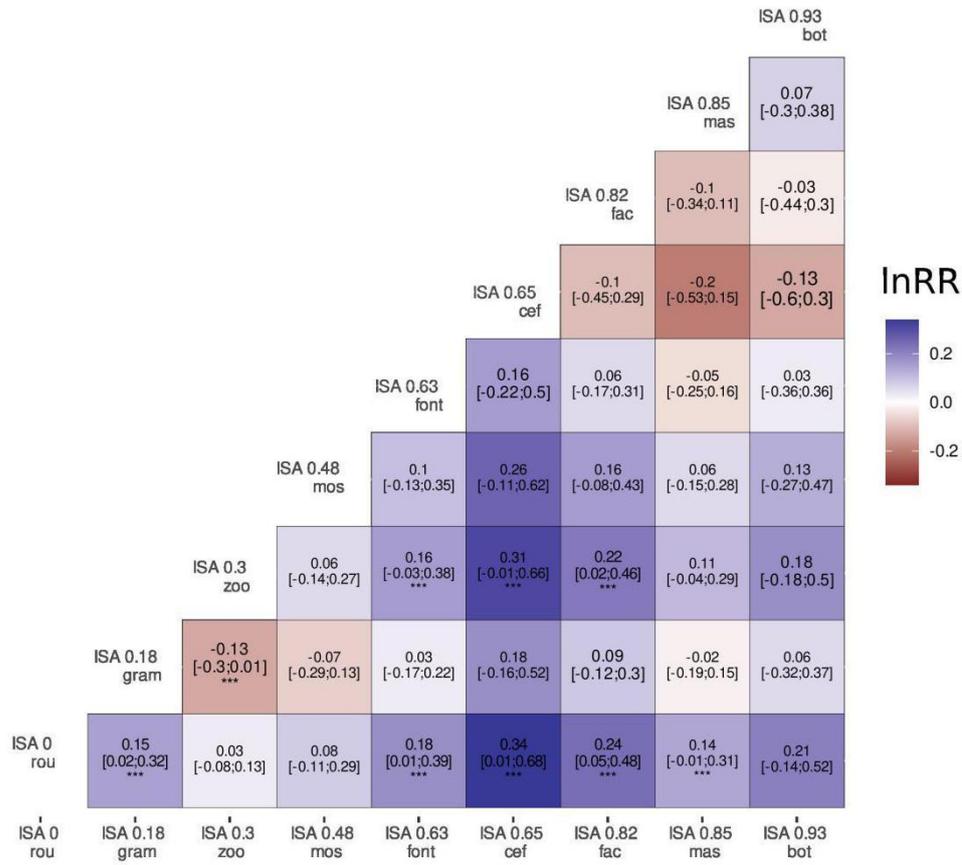


Figure S3. Pairwise log response ratio (lnRR) and their 95% credible interval for HA between the 9 locations of the study system (and their corresponding 1000 metres ISA). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA (buffer 1000m). A positive lnRR (in blue) value means that location on the x-axis as a higher mean than the location on the y-axis.

A - BRI

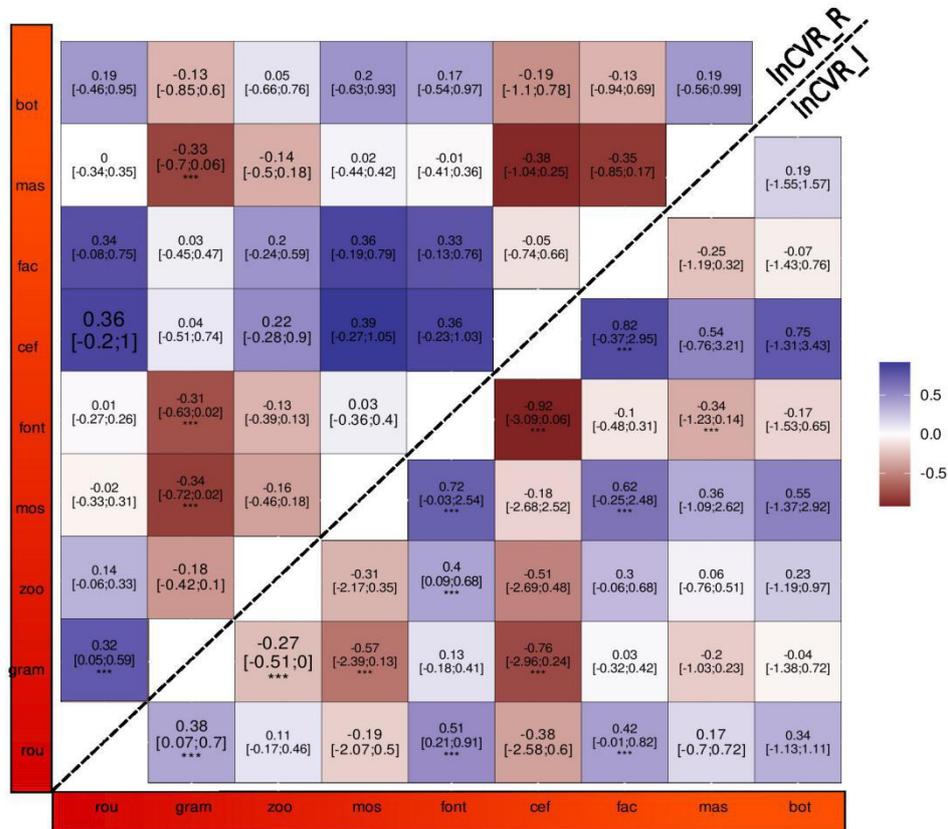


Figure S4A. Pairwise log-coefficient variance ratio (InCVR) and their 95% credible interval for BRI between the 9 locations of the study system (and their corresponding 1000 metres ISA). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA (buffer 1000m), which is also represented in an orange gradient, with dark orange indicating higher levels of ISA. InCVR for within individual variance (InCVR_R) is above the diagonal while InCVR for among-individual variance (InCVR_I) is below the diagonal. Note that for HA we represented InCVR for total phenotypic variance (InCVR_P) as the threshold model does not estimate residual variance. Positive, zero and negative InCVR are shown in blue, white and red respectively. A positive (in blue) value means that the location on the x-axis has a greater coefficient of variation (and so associated variance) than the location on the y-axis. See the supplementary materials to have access to all the values.

B - HA

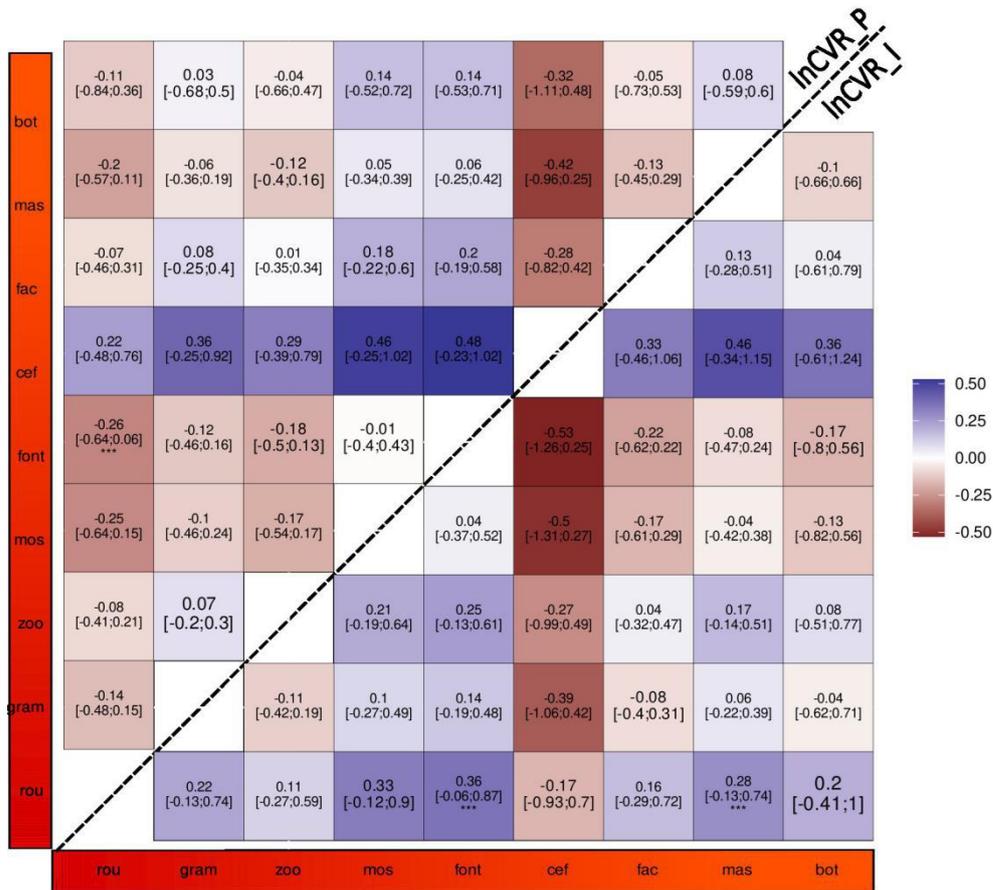


Figure S4B. Pairwise log-coefficient variance ratio (InCVR) and their 95% credible interval for HA between the 9 locations of the study system (and their corresponding 1000 metres ISA). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA (buffer 1000m), which is also represented in an orange gradient, with dark orange indicating higher levels of ISA. InCVR for within individual variance (InCVR_R) is above the diagonal while InCVR for among-individual variance (InCVR_I) is below the diagonal. Note that for HA we represented InCVR for total phenotypic variance (InCVR_P) as the threshold model does not estimate residual variance. Positive, zero and negative InCVR are shown in blue, white and red respectively. A positive (in blue) value means that the location on the x-axis has a greater coefficient of variation (and so associated variance) than the location on the y-axis. See the supplementary materials to have access to all the values.

C - ES

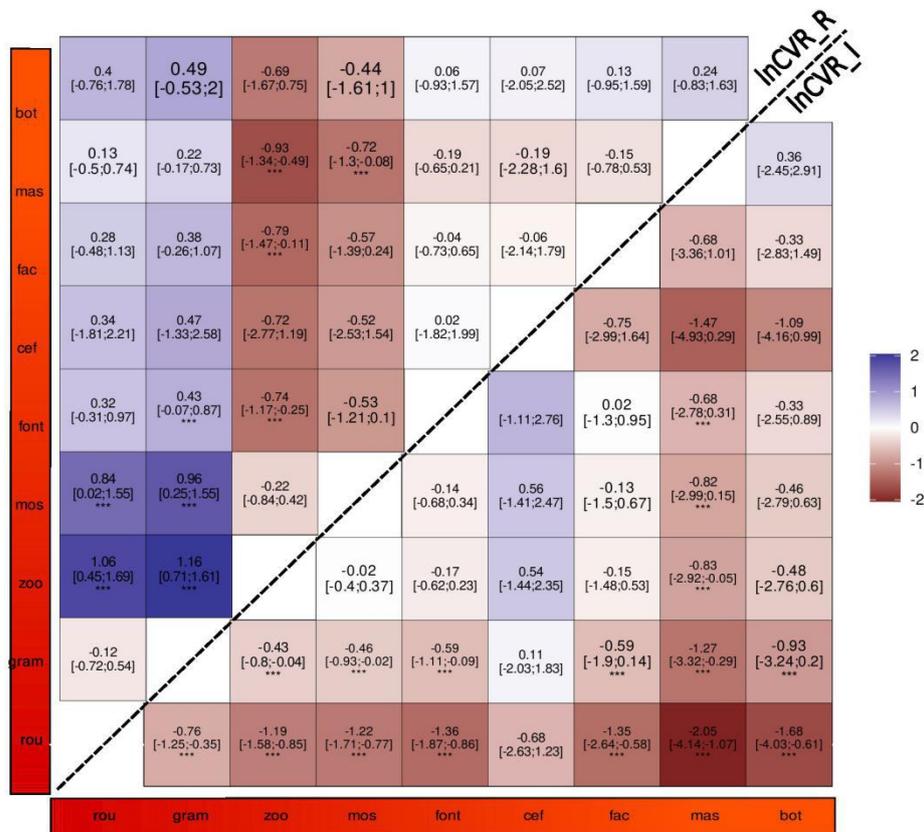


Figure S4C. Pairwise log-coefficient variance ratio (InCVR) and their 95% credible interval for ES between the 9 locations of the study system (and their corresponding 1000 metres ISA). The 9 locations are ordered by ascending mean ISA (buffer 1000m), which is also represented in an orange gradient, with dark orange indicating higher levels of ISA. InCVR for within individual variance (InCVR_R) is above the diagonal while InCVR for among-individual variance (InCVR_I) is below the diagonal. Note that for HA we represented InCVR for total phenotypic variance (InCVR_P) as the threshold model does not estimate residual variance. Positive, zero and negative InCVR are shown in blue, white and red respectively. A positive (in blue) value means that the location on the x-axis has a greater coefficient of variation (and so associated variance) than the location on the y-axis. See the supplementary materials to have access to all the values.

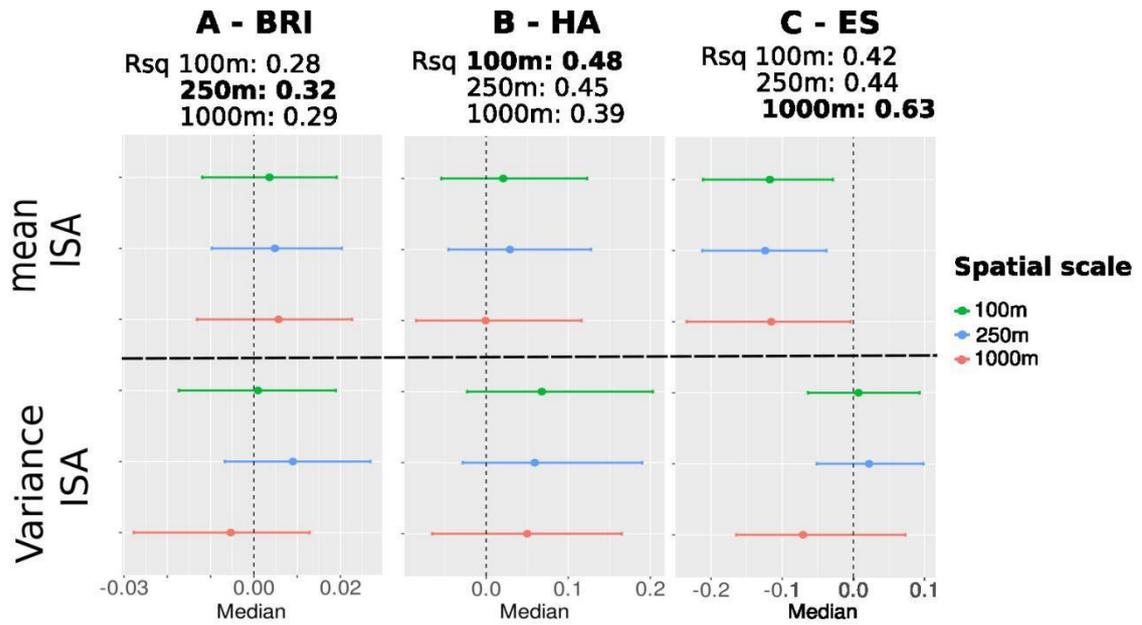


Figure S5. Magnitude of relationship between mean ISA and variance in ISA with the mean-standardized among-individual variance (CVI) and their associated 95 % credible intervals, for breath rate index (BRI) handling aggression (HA) and exploration score (ES). ISA was measured at different scales (100, 250 and 1000 metres, in green, blue and red respectively). Rsq refers to the mean of bayesian-R2 over the iterations of the models and the highest rsq is reported in bold.