DIGESTIBILITY IN GREYLAG GEESE (Anser anser) 
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONTEXT

D. Frigerio1,2, V. Puehringer-Sturmayr1,2, J. Hemetsberger1,2, L. Iaiza3, F. Mason3, C. Sarnataro3, C. Fabro3, S. Filacorda3

1 Core facility KLF for Behaviour and Cognition, University of Vienna, Fischerau 11, 4645 Grünau im Almtal, Austria; 2 Department of Behavioural Biology, University of Vienna, Althanstrasse 14, 1090 Vienna, Austria; 3 Department of Agro-Food, Environmental and Animal Science, University of Udine, Italy.

Social context is known to modulate physiology, behaviour, fertility and immune system of group living animals.

Is social context also affecting apparent digestibility?

Is apparent digestibility predicting reproductive success?

CONCLUSION: Our findings suggest social status to modulate digestive capability, probably by dampening the stress response in socially well embedded individuals. Apparent digestibility seems to bear long term effects on breeding success and fitness.

METHODS:
38 birds of the semi-tame and individually marked flock at the Konrad Lorenz Research Station in Upper Austria.
4 different social categories, i.e. paired with and without offspring, unpaired, juveniles
9 consecutive days in winter 2017 (closed snow pack)
184 individual droppings (mean = 4.8; standard deviation = 0.4)
Lignin as indigestible marker -> estimation of the apparent digestibility of organic matter (OM)

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Differences depending on social status
Parental individuals show a greater digestive capability as compared to pairs without offspring or unpaired birds.

Differences depending on reproductive success
Individuals with a greater capability of digesting organic matter were more likely to be reproductive successful in the forthcoming season.

Differences depending on reprocutive success
Success
hatchlings no hatchlings
Apparent digestibility of OM (%)0 20 40 60 80

Differences depending on social status
Social status
with without unpaired juveniles
Apparent digestibility of OM (%)0 20 40 60 80

offspring offspring