Birds slow way down to live the tropical life

Tuesday, June 12, 2007 3:29 AM

Tropical birds enjoy a slower pace, according to new research out of Ohio State University.

Their northern cousins, it turns out, spend a lot of energy just to survive.

The findings show tropical birds grow more slowly and live longer, according to biologists Joseph Williams and Popko Wiersma.

Williams, a professor of evolution, ecology and organismal biology, and Wiersma, a postdoctoral researcher, reported their findings online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"Lower energy use fits with the life history of these tropical birds, which is different than those living in temperate climates," Wiersma said.

Tropical birds also lay fewer eggs.

Williams and Wiersma captured 69 species of tropical birds in Panama and measured the amount of energy they expend at rest.

They found tropical birds use 16 percent less energy.

The scientists also compared energy rates in birds in the same genus or family, such as flycatchers or swallows, and found that the tropicaals used about 13 percent less energy.

Neotropicals, birds that migrate north in the spring and summer, also spend more energy than year-round tropicaals, but they still spend less energy than northern birds.