



BIRDING BY EAR

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Why Birding By Ear?

- You can detect many more birds.
- You can identify to species many more birds.
- It enriches your experience of birdlife.
- It enables you to more efficiently and effectively conduct surveys and censuses.
- **At night, it's difficult to bird by sight!!**

Topics We'll Discuss

- The nature of bird sounds
- Strategies for learning to bird by ear
- Resources available to help you learn to bird by ear and to develop/reinforce your skills

Types of Bird Sounds:

Vocalizations

- **Songs**
 - Generally for mate attraction and territorial display.
 - Sometimes accompanied by displays – e.g. flight songs.
 - Usually only the male sings.
 - Can be simple, but many are rather elaborate.
- **Calls: short, simple vocalizations**
 - Contact calls, given by both sexes
 - Alarm calls
 - Flight calls
 - “Display calls” and “Courtship Calls” of ducks, hawks and others play the role of song.

Learning of Songs/Calls by Birds

- Calls of passerines and the vocalizations of non-passerine birds and flycatchers are inherited
 - Variation in these vocalizations is limited
- Songs of passerine birds are learned
 - Much variation
 - Regional dialects
 - Sometimes the wrong songs are learned
 - Mimics: Mockingbirds, Starlings

Strategies to Learn Songs/Calls

- Bird vocalizations have structure
 - Tempo and pattern
 - Number of notes in a phrase and phrases in a song; slow or rapid tempo; long or short pauses
 - Pitch
 - Overall pitch and changes in pitch
 - Quality
 - Liquid; metallic; whistled; warbled; buzzy; trilly
 - Loudness
 - Changes in loudness during the song

Learn to Describe Sounds

- Breakdown in tempo, pattern, pitch, quality, loudness
- Phonetics/mnenomics
- Narrative descriptions
- Drawn versions of sounds

Some Cautions and Other Notes

- There is a lot of variation.
- Beware the sounds of mammals, amphibians, and insects.
- Songs are easier to learn, but calls can be very, very useful.
- Related species often have similar calls and songs
- Be aware ... study ... practice.
- **Yearn to know what every noise is!!!**