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!!!