TIPS FOR LEARNING BIRD SOUNDS

LEARN FROM THE BIRDS—IN PERSON

First, make it easy on yourself. Start at home, or some favorite place of yours you have easy and frequent access to. Go outside. Listen. If you're starting from scratch and you don't know any of the bird sounds you hear, pick one, one most interesting to you, one you're most curious about, and go find the bird, drinking in and savoring every aspect of the sound as you search for the bird. Listen to the quality, the phrases, if any, the harshness, or musical nature…. If you don't find the bird the first time, don't worry about it. Try again. For now, makes some notes on the sound you were following (in your head, on paper better). Then try a different bird/sound. When you do find the bird, it will be an *aha* moment, where you connect the sound with the bird. At that moment, don't walk away, continue watching, seeing what it does, where it sings from, how it moves when it sings. Listen more to its song, and be alert for short call notes that it may make. Listen to those too. These all become part of your familiarity with the bird. Once you have learned one pretty well, start again with another sound or species!!! Over time you will build quite a familiarity with these birds!

HOW TO MAKE IT SINK IN (try any or all of these in person or with techno helps below)

Concentrate on the sound, letting it sink in. Tune out other things, visual, other sounds, focus, concentrate on the bird and its sound, like looking deep into a beautiful painting.

- Think about the sound. What descriptive words come to mind? Articulate vocabulary that describes what you hear. Write it down if you can.
- Draw representations of the sound. One way to do this is with the vertical dimension being pitch, horizontal being time. Make marks that represent the sound and modify as you hear more detail. You can make the boldness of the mark to represent loudness, and sharpness of or fuzziness of the mark represent the clarity of the note. Whatever makes it clear to you.
- Come up with phrases or words that sound to you like the sound that you hear. Write them down. Many of you have heard of things like "Quick Three Beers!" for the song of the Olive-sided Flycatcher. And its usual call, "pip-pip-pip."
- Keep a journal or loose-leaf binder with all these notes. Refer to them for reminders.
- For difficult to distinguish species, it will take more time and effort using all the above techniques, and technological helps (below) can also be of assistance.

TECHNOLOGICAL HELPS

There are all kinds of online sources for bird sounds, and apps for your phone that have bird sounds, but the following two are specifically meant for study and comparison.

I highly recommend Dendroica: **www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/**. This is an excellent, free, online site for reviewing and quizzing yourself on bird sounds, developed by and for people who do field surveys. You can create custom lists of any size to review and quiz yourself. It includes spectrograms and photos.

Larkwire: **www.larkwire.com** (up to $45) has online and app versions (iOS only). Default sets of similar-sounding birds include species "not from around here," but you can customize these or create your own. This program will only quiz four species at a time, so you have to reshuffle to pick up other species. Does not include spectrograms.

Best use of either program: make custom lists/sets that you can review and quiz yourself with. If you are just beginning or feel rusty, make a custom list using just the most common 5-10 species in your area. Listen to each of them, looking at the photos as well, to connect the sounds to a visual of the species. Once you feel you know these sounds, quiz yourself until you are almost never stumped. Then add 5-10 more species and repeat the process. If you know your bird songs and calls pretty well already, you can begin by making a custom list that includes most or all the species expected in your area of interest. See www.umpquabirds.org for Seasonal Occurrence Charts that show which species are expected different times of year.

www.earbirding.com has info and links to follow regarding the art and science of earbirding.
www.xeno-canto.org is a crowd-sourced global site with many recordings of many species.

SOME BIRD SOUND VOCABULARY (adapted from earbirding.com)

Song Patterns:
Phrase—individual notes variable and slow enough to count
Warble—individual notes variable but rather fast, too fast to count
Series—individual notes repeated and slow enough to count
Trill—individual notes repeated but too fast to count

Tone Qualities:
These are much more difficult to pin down, but I have found these descriptors helpful.
Clear vs. **burry**/**buzzy** (e.g. American Robin vs. Western Tanager)
Whistle- or flute-like vs. **voice-like** (e.g. Northern Pygmy-Owl vs. Pileated Woodpecker)
Fluid vs. **choppy** vs. **quavery** (Purple Finch vs. Wilson's Warbler vs. Brown Creeper)
Nasal, **ringing**, **grating** (e.g. Cooper's Hawk, Dark-eyed Junco, Steller's Jay, respectively)
Others—whatever helps convey the quality you hear (e.g., to me Swainson's and Hermit Thrush songs sound like they are singing into a pipe or culvert, there is a hollow/echo quality).

Pitch and Patterns:
May be applied to individual notes or whole songs.
High/Low—the relative pitch of the sound(s)
Monotone—sounds do not change in pitch.
Rising—sounds rise in pitch
Falling—sounds fall in pitch
Rise and Fall—pitch rises and then falls, sounding highest in the middle.
Fall and Rise—pitch falls and then rises, sounding lowest in the middle.

Changes in Speed:
Accelerates—notes or phrases become closer together
Decelerates—notes or phrases become farther apart

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