

Listening to a Continent Sing - Birdsong by Bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific by Donald Kroodsmma

By Cathy Taibbi

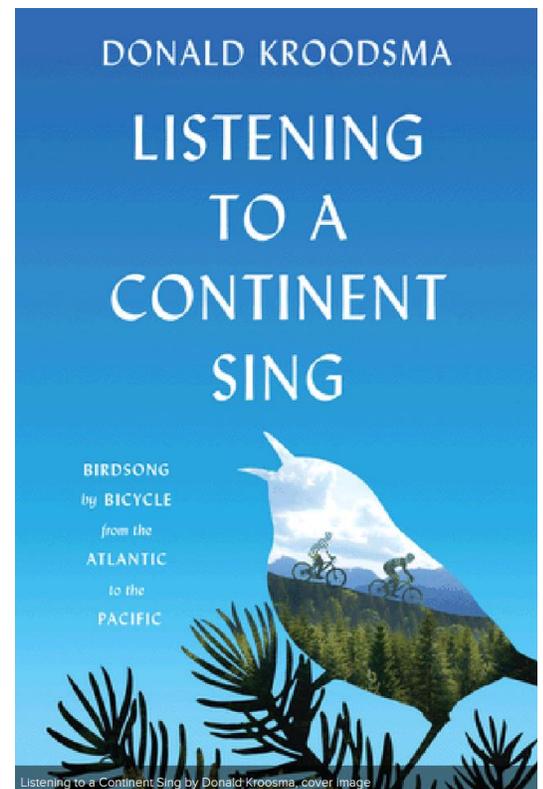
<http://www.examiner.com/review/listening-to-a-continent-sing-by-donald-kroodsmma>

Rating: Star Star Star Star Star

OK, this book is too much fun. The full title is *Listening to a Continent Sing - Birdsong by Bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific*. This isn't just your average field guide. In fact, the Wildlife [Conservation Examiner](#) has never had the privilege of reviewing any other book like this. First is the inclusion of [QR codes](#) throughout - Each one representing a nice, lengthy (sometimes several minutes long) sample of bird songs recorded during this father/son cross country bicycle journey. If you croon over our avian friends, obsess over music and crave natural melodies, this book could easily create an addiction.

It took a while, however, for this book to get its review. To be honest, the Wildlife Conservation Examiner is pretty much a technologically-challenged cyber-age cripple. So not only is 'living via cellphone internet' not a normal part of daily life, but downloading unknown programs is scary. But, biting the bullet, a free QR reader was downloaded and one aging smartphone aimed at a random QR code in the book - In this case, at the remarkable and jubilantly melodious [lark sparrow](#) - And *voila!* A surprisingly beautiful and little-known true sparrow with one of the most glorious songs one could hope for began singing. The link above directs to Kroodsmma's companion website, where those without a smart phone or QR code reader can still listen to his delicious recordings of our talented songsters.

"The Wildlife Conservation Examiner was transformed by this book. In fact, my cell phone is playing the glorious sage thrasher as we speak."



You get the full audio experience when you play these spectacular, clear recordings, including all the other music and songsters (including singing insects) that weave in and out of the sample bird's concert. Open your heart and imagination and you're standing in a field, in the sun, on a gorgeous day, reveling in the unrestrained symphony conducted by the Colorado [savannah sparrow](#). Or the Western wood pewee, or the [bobolink](#) - And the best thing is, books are portable.

Read about the birds, and the father-son journey, in between playing the songs. Take a listen during your lunch break for a mental and spiritual vacation. There are additional recordings of, for instance, savannah sparrows, on the companion website, lovingly gathered from other places, longer, with differing textures. Go there right now and hear them for your self.

Well, like a kid with a new toy, that was the start of an obsession. Text? Story line? Message - ? Who cares? Over and over, that was put on the back burner as the compulsion to flip pages scanning every QR code available took the reviewer (happily) hostage. Will this be how all books are in the future? What a brilliant idea! Now the Wildlife Conservation Examiner is hoping the author will write a companion book of amphibian song, or night songs - Combining audio and text creates a real experience. And if you want to see the birds in question, you're not confined to just the quaint drawings in the book - You can visit the [companion website](#) and see a photo and birding info on each featured species as well as more recordings. But be careful - That can be addictive, too.

Oh yeah, the story is charming, funny, poignant and heartwarming, too. How many people have undertaken a cross-country biking and camping journey, not just with a camera, but with an ear for the natural soundscape? Kroodsma gives us a glimpse into a realm many of us will never get to experience first-hand. Some of the birdsong samples are actually of groups of species (audio snapshots of precious living biosystems), or other interesting audios recorded along their journey. Plus we get all the background and details about each recording, all backed by years of in-the-field authority. Author and lifelong nature lover, Donald Kroodsma is a well known and respected professor emeritus of ornithology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, as well as, or course, birdsong expert. His love, passion and concern for our natural world - and our avian gems - just spills from the pages and is, frankly, contagious.

This volume has to get an enthusiastic 5 stars - And you can bet the Wildlife Conservation Examiner will be on the lookout for follow-ups. If you're going to treat yourself to one special gift this summer, make it this one. Enjoy!

[Listening to a Continent Sing](#), by Donald Kroodsma, published by Princeton University Press.