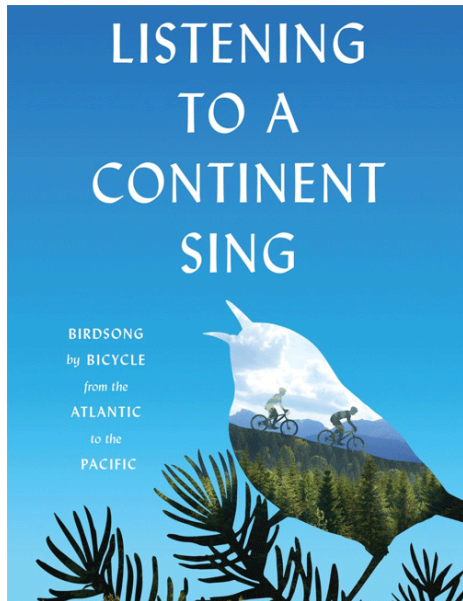


Listening to a Continent Sing: Birdsong by bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific

Donald Kroodsma



£2.40 from every sale will be donated to Birdlife's [Spoon-billed Sandpiper campaign](#)

At its simplest this book is the author's account of a bike trip with his son across America from east to west, from Yorktown, Virginia to Newport, Oregon. As such it falls neatly into the established tradition of any American road trip but this book has a whole other dimension.

Kroodsma is one of America's (and indeed the world's) leading academics in the field of bird songs (he is Professor of Ornithology at the University of Massachusetts) and the road trip provides him with the framework to explore and showcase the full diversity of the continent's aural landscape. To a birdwatcher brought up on the importance of observation, his approach (hearing birds and recording them rather than seeing and photographing them) seems initially a little odd but the reader soon attunes to the idea and relaxes into the unfolding soundscape.

It is quickly clear that Kroodsma is a master of his subject, educating his son (and thereby the reader too) in the true complexity of bird songs – dawn songs, daytime songs, multiple song types, geographical variations etc. This latter aspect is particularly fascinating, feeding as it does into the ongoing taxonomic debates about species limits in western and eastern birds. He notes, for example, the exact transition point (in the Daniel Boone National Forest, Kentucky) between the eastern and western songs of Northern Parula, the hybrid zone (in western Missouri) between Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees and the point (on Montana's continental divide) at which Winter Wrens become Pacific Wrens. Although the account feeds the imagination splendidly we

can also listen in to the actual birds themselves thanks to the book's 381 QR codes which link directly to online recordings at ListeningToAContinentSing.com.

By the end of the author's journey the reader will have experienced a prolonged masterclass in birdsong study but the book can be appreciated at a simpler level too, as a celebration of some of America's most alluring landscapes – the Appalachian forests, the boundless grasslands of Kansas, the soaring wall of the Rockies and the roaring surf of the Pacific. It is also a personal book, recounting a father's evolving relationship with his son and a rationalisation of the author's decision to quit the financially-driven and politicised world of academia and begin a new life in search of birds.

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However this book is approached, Kroodsma is an accomplished storyteller and an engaging guide. It will appeal to the general reader of travel narratives but there is much of value here too for the ardent birder, lister and taxonomist.

Andy Stoddart
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