

Ornithological Literature

John Faaborg, Book Review Editor

LISTENING TO A CONTINENT SING, BIRDSONG BY BICYCLE FROM THE ATLANTIC TO THE PACIFIC. By Donald Kroodsma. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 2016: xvi + 311 pages. ISBN: 978-0-691-16681-0. \$29.95 (hardback).—Don Kroodsma makes bicycling and birdsong go together like peanut butter and jelly, which you will be eating often if you do as he did and bicycle across the continent! But bicycling and birdsong are but two themes of the legion Kroodsma paints into this well illustrated and well-tuned masterpiece. He and his 24-year-old son David bicycle for 71 days from Yorktown, Virginia (4 May) to the Oregon coast (12 July) describing each portion of the journey in 31 chapters. The trials and tribulations of bicycling are described in wonderful remembrance for me, as I shared the broken spokes and chasing dogs 40 years ago on a much shorter route (Annapolis to Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania) on my Schwinn Paramount! The wonderful camaraderie between Don and David, with David's disinclination, or perhaps it is stubbornness he probably inherited from Don, to admire the birds' vocal performances and their soundscapes as much as Don. The way the two complimented each other, David the cook/bicycle repair guy and Don the planner, prove that cooperation can be achieved even within diverse views of the world.

I read the first 100 pages of the book without listening to it. I don't mean listening to a narration as you doze off in a hammock. I mean 381 recordings of birds, people, and places. For this you need a smart phone to read the QR codes that pepper the pages. I am one of the 30% who do not have a smart phone. After 100 pages, my curiosity made me turn to the book's website where I could listen to the QRs on my pc. What a treat. I found myself mesmerized, skipping around to hear a certain bird and see its photograph or the person or the scene. I almost forgot to get back to the narrative! The website offers a list of the 200 bird species Don recorded either by number or location from Virginia to Oregon. All the sounds can be downloaded, and Don suggests watching them

flow across your screen using free software like Raven. Slow them down to hear what a bird ear hears and be amazed at the intricacy in even simple songs like a Henslow's Sparrow's *tsi-lik*.

Of Don's specialties, getting up early to listen to birdsong can be quite maddening to those of us, including fellow biker David, who need to wake up slowly, later than dawn, and smelling coffee. I must admit that the dawnsongs, these special songs sung only at dawn or before, often at no other time of day, do merit the extraordinary devotion Don gives them. You can listen to dawnsongs of birds in each state or by taxonomic group. Although this is termed a 'dawn chorus,' I felt a chorus implied a combined singing of many species at dawn, which is not the case here.

This book will be enjoyed by anyone with a general interest in natural history, or bicycling, not just those interested in ornithology or birdsong. So many themes permeate this fine book you are sure to find much of interest and learn a great deal about birdsong in the process. What a trip!—EUGENE S. MORTON, 22318 Teepleville Flats Road, Cambridge Springs, PA 16403, USA; e-mail: mortone@si.edu

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