

BOOK REVIEWS

The Cornell Guide to Bird Sounds: Master Set for North America, by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. 2013. www.macaulaylibrary.org. \$49.99.

Familiarity with bird vocalizations is an integral part of birding, identification, and understanding behavior. Thus a good sound library is critical for anyone with a strong interest in birds. A suite of CDs, websites, and apps is available to satisfy this need, each with varying geographic coverage, number of vocalizations per species, quality, and overlap in sound libraries. The *Cornell Guide to Bird Sounds: Master Set for North America* (Master Set) stands apart from other sound libraries in its massive scope, with 4938 recordings of 735 species. Recordings are meant to represent the vocal and nonvocal repertoire of each species, as well as geographic variation and dialects.

This set is essentially a compilation of the most representative recordings available in the Macaulay Library of Natural Sound, an enormous archive of recordings accumulated since 1929. The library was recently digitized and is available online in a searchable format (<http://macaulaylibrary.org>), but wading through all the available recordings can be cumbersome. Many are not labeled with vocalization type, or are not labeled correctly (especially song vs. call), some are very long clips with a variety of sounds, and quality varies. The Master Set excels at making this enormous resource more user-friendly for someone wishing to learn a bird's vocalizations, look up a mystery sound, or even learn a little about the function of a certain call. Another benefit of the Master Set is its portability. Once the set has been downloaded to a computer, the files can be organized to suit the user's needs, displayed in a computer media player such as iTunes or Windows Media Player, or downloaded onto a mobile device. For birders who want a smaller but still robust sound library with fewer examples of uncommon vocalizations and regional dialects, the Cornell Guide to Bird Sounds is also available in an Essential Set for North America, with nearly as many species as the Master Set but about a third of the recordings and a much smaller size at 812 MB.

The Master Set comes as a downloadable 4.71-GB .zip file, organized into three folders arranged in alphabetical order by species. Each file name includes the species, location (two-letter state or province code or three-letter country code), and a description of the song or call type. A "track number" orders the set taxonomically, so it is easy to sort the entire set into taxonomic order (following Clements version 6.7; <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>). A "Comments" field includes a suite of additional information, including scientific name, location, date, recordist, and the Macaulay Library catalog number. Also included is a photo of each species, which pops up when the track is played, a nice touch. A booklet included with the download has a good deal of background information, including resources, credits, and a handy "How to Use" section. It also includes contact information for users to send in feedback (see below).

One aspect of the Master Set that sets it apart from other audio guides is its focus on highlighting geographic variation. Not only is every recording labeled with location, but many species are split into field-identifiable "groups" with representative recordings of each. Clearly a great deal of effort went into selecting not only the most distinctive variations but many more subtle differences as well. Each "call type" of the Red Crossbill and the Evening Grosbeak is included, as well as each "group" of the White-crowned Sparrow, and I was delighted to hear the distinctive Martha's Vineyard song type of the Black-capped Chickadee. There are a variety of clips for widespread and variable species such as the White-breasted Nuthatch, Bewick's Wren, and Dark-eyed Junco, although the Red-backed Junco (*Junco hyemalis dorsalis*) is not represented. Many vagrants to North America are also included. Most of these are represented by only one or two recordings, although a few have a variety of sounds given. For example, there are four clips of song and one of call of the Golden-crowned

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Warbler, and several of the Fork-tailed Flycatcher, including the dawn song.

For such an enormous undertaking, it is perhaps to be expected that the Master Set suffers from a lack of consistency, many missing vocalization types, and containing a few errors. In general, species that are widespread, well studied, or highly variable are well represented in this set. For example, there are 20 clips each of the Common Raven and of the Great Gray Owl, and 23 of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. On the other hand, there are only three tracks of the Pinyon Jay, which has a large and varied repertoire. The Song Sparrow is well represented in song, with an array of examples from different populations, but only two call types are given. The Master Set booklet claims that it represents “the full vocal repertoire” of many regular North American breeding species, but this claim is not met for many others. One of the most glaring examples for me is in the towhees, for which each species has several examples of songs but only one clip of the typical contact call. For the three “brown” towhees with which I am most familiar (Abert’s, California, and Canyon), this set should include high-pitched “seet” calls, aggression, alarm, and begging calls, and especially the distinctive “squeal duet.” Clips of the Anna’s and Black-chinned hummingbirds do not include the dive displays. Although the Master Set does include most species likely to be encountered in North America, a few regular North American species are not represented. The Pink-footed Shearwater, one of the most vocal North American seabirds away from its breeding islands, is one example. A few species with limited ranges, such as the Red-faced Cormorant, are also absent from this set. Given the size and scope of this work, I found relatively very few errors. These included a prominent song of a Rufous-winged Sparrow included in a recording of a family of Verdins, and the typical daytime song of the Ash-throated Flycatcher is labeled as a “possible dawn song.” The assembly call of the Gambel’s Quail is labeled “song,” and the male’s advertisement calls are simply labeled “call.” whereas equivalent vocalizations of the California Quail are labeled and ordered correctly.

To the developers’ credit, the booklet notes that this is a work in progress, and contact information is given for those who wish to send in additional recordings, comments, suggestions, or corrections. It is also noted that those who purchase the Master Set will be notified when additions or corrections are available.

The strength of the Master Set is not as a compendium of the entire vocal repertoire of North American birds but as a thorough, well-organized collection of the most representative recordings available in the Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds. This is by far the most extensive portable sound library available today. It will be useful to advanced birders as well as to researchers for a wide array of purposes, and is extremely interesting and informative to simply browse. I enjoyed stumbling upon recordings of human mimicry by the European Starling and the American Crow, the advertising hoot of a Barred × Spotted Owl hybrid, and even recordings of the Bachman’s Warbler, Ivory-billed Woodpecker and Dusky Seaside Sparrow. The Master Set is a treasure trove of sounds that can only improve with further additions and input from the ornithological community, making available the sounds of the bird world that can improve our understanding of the birds around us.

Lauren B. Harter

California Condors in the Pacific Northwest, by Jesse D’Elia and Susan M. Haig, illustrations by Ram Papish, foreword by Noel Snyder. 2013. Oregon State University Press. 208 + xvi pp., 29 black-and-white figures including five maps, and five tables. Paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-87071-700-0; e-book, ISBN 978-0-87071-701-7.

This slim volume is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the historic occurrence of the California Condor from California north of San Francisco Bay to southern Canada. It is perhaps not widely recognized that the condor was at one

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time a conspicuous element of the Pacific Northwest's avifauna. We may associate condors with the open, semi-arid mountain ranges of southern California, their last redoubt, rather than with the dense coastal forest habitats to the north. However, the authors compile a carefully scrutinized and apparently exhaustive list of 81 reports from the Pacific Northwest dating from Lewis and Clark's first observation while they descended the Columbia River gorge on 28 October 1805 to a 1925 report from Siskiyou County, California. Dave DeSante's sighting of a single condor soaring over the Stanford University campus in March of 1971 falls a bit south of the region covered by this study (J. Nisbet, *Visible Bones*, Sasquatch Books, Seattle, 2003, pp. 55–58).

The established facts with regard to the condor's occurrence in this northern portion of its historic range are of more than academic interest. From a low point of just 22 in the early 1980s, through prodigious efforts by recovery teams, there are today over 400 living condors, including over 200 that have been reintroduced into the wild from several captive-breeding programs. These free-flying condors have been released in southern and central California, northeastern Arizona, and northern Baja California. Several pairs have successfully fledged young in the wild. However, these populations are carefully monitored and managed, provisioned, and periodically captured for lead detoxification, which is a serious continuing threat to the success of these reintroductions. The aggressive management required offends the sensibility of some passionate observers. If ultimately successful, however, these efforts may be appreciated as atonement for our prior sins.

If the condor was once a well-established permanent resident of the Pacific Northwest, future reintroductions along our rugged and sparsely populated coast might well be successful. The historical evidence the authors compile here supports that supposition. Though they found no firm proof of nesting within the Pacific Northwest, they address the controversy with respect to whether condors were permanent residents or just seasonal visitors to the region, a key consideration for any attempt at reintroductions here.

The first Euroamerican explorers and naturalists to visit these regions, notably, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Alexander Henry, David Thompson, David Douglas, William Fraser Tolmie, John Kirk Townsend, and Titian Ramsey Peale, reported observing condors frequently at various seasons and in substantial numbers along the lower Columbia, the Willamette, Umpqua, Rogue, Klamath, and Sacramento rivers, even north to the lower Fraser and east of the Cascades on the Columbia. By the 1850s, however, the condor was judged rare and declining in these northern regions.

The authors evaluate several competing explanations for this early and precipitous decline. They make a compelling case that the primary threat to the condor at this time was the widespread use of poisoned bait to protect livestock raised at the early fur-trading posts and missions. For example, John McLoughlin, chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company outpost at Fort Vancouver on the lower Columbia, ordered strychnine for that purpose as early as 1839 (pp. 79–80). Ironically, lead poisoning from lead shot remains a potent threat to the survival of condors reintroduced in recent years.

The Oregon Zoo initiated breeding condors in 2003. In 2007 the Yurok Tribe on the Smith River in northwesternmost California voted to support a study of the feasibility of reintroducing condors within their traditional territory. Perhaps condor recovery will be more effective in the Pacific Northwest than elsewhere given that the threat of poisoning could be much reduced here.

The authors take note of the ethnographic and linguistic evidence of Native American observers. Though they left no written accounts that meet contemporary scholarly standards of evidence, it is clear that Native peoples throughout the Pacific Northwest (and beyond, to the high Plains east of the northern Rockies) were well acquainted with the California Condor, as Brian Sharp has meticulously documented ("The California Condor in Northwestern North America," *Western Birds* 43:54-89,

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2012). The authors are critical of some of Sharp's claims, but are in agreement on the fundamentals. They effectively dismiss the facile equation of the condor with the mythical thunderbird, noting that thunderbird legends have a much wider distribution that scarcely overlaps that of the known Anthropocene range of the California Condor. They also dismiss as most unlikely that Native communities might have contributed significantly to the rapid decline of the condor in the mid-1800s (pp. 98–99). They note that Native people coexisted with the condor throughout the West for millennia and that they suffered massive population declines as a result of introduced diseases and hostility from settlers at the very time the condor population was plummeting.

If one day soon we may marvel at the sight of this "beatifull Buzzard of the columbia" (Meriwether Lewis, 3 January 1806, in Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, vol. 6, p. 162) at home along the rugged Northwest coast, the authors' meticulous research will be amply rewarded.

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