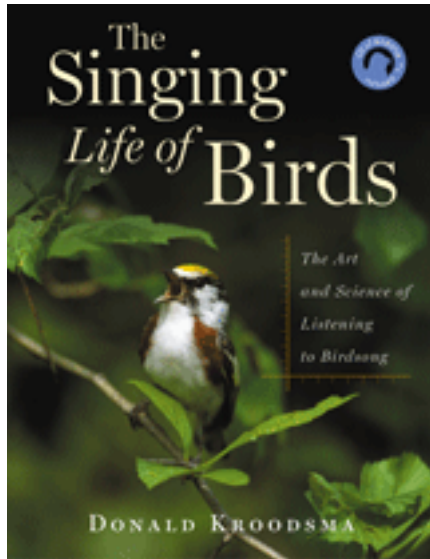


Press Release



The Singing Life of Birds

by Donald Kroodsma

- [About the Book](#)
- [About the Author](#)

"Kroodsma is a warm, encouraging guide to the world of birdsong, and his enthusiasm is contagious." — *Publishers Weekly*

"Anyone who wonders why birds sing, if their songs are learned or inherited, why mockingbirds sing at night, or why some species mimic will find engaging answers in this authoritative and entertaining book on bird vocalizations." — *Library Journal*

About the Book

For centuries, the question of why birds sing and what their songs mean has captured the imagination of scientists, naturalists, and poets alike. In *The Singing Life of Birds* (Houghton Mifflin, April 6, 2005), the author and scientist Donald Kroodsma takes readers on a listening adventure to understand the hidden dramas in their backyards. With absorbing detail, he puts the reader inside the mind of both the research scientist and the singing bird itself, exploring how and why birds sing and how we can better understand them through their songs.

Kroodsma's discussion of the "finest natural music on the planet" explains how birds acquire their songs, what makes the songs unique, why songs change from place to place, and how they've evolved. He examines issues of sex (why does only the male usually sing?) as well as issues of quality (why are some birds extraordinary singers and others not?). Why are some songs so very complex, especially beautiful, or never-ending? By answering these questions, Kroodsma divulges the mysteries of the avian chorus around us.

The book provides sonograms — picture voiceprints — that plot a sound's frequency over time, revealing the tone, rhythm, change, and diversity present in birdsong. Graphing the melodies of birds offers a way to follow along to the songs with one's eyes, as if looking at a musical score. The sonograms illustrate the songs of thirty birds, from the familiar American robin to the exotic three-wattled bellbird of Costa Rica. A wood thrush, for instance, has two

voice boxes, and the sonograms in the book (page 249) reveal the complex tunes and extraordinary harmony within the thrush's song that one can hear when the songs are slowed to one-tenth of their normal speed on the compact disk. Also celebrated is the hermit thrush, widely hailed as the most gifted songster in all of North America; seeing his sonograms (page 258) and hearing his songs reveal for the first time how this maestro chooses his next song so as to create an especially striking performance.

The Singing Life of Birds also includes a compact disk with ninety-eight carefully chosen tracks that correspond to the sonograms. This provides for the first time an opportunity for readers to hear the sounds and see them illustrated simultaneously. Readers will begin to hear detail in birdsong they once thought impossible.

With detailed descriptions about the recording equipment he used, information about how to make similar recordings and to create one's own sonograms, and an extensive bibliography, Kroodsma's book provides everything a reader needs to know to understand the fundamentals of "avian bioacoustics." Together with highly personal stories of robins and wrens, whippoorwills and woodcocks, thrushes and thrashers, flycatchers and sparrows, and so many more, the book reveals why a reader should care about this natural music.

"The book is about the miracle of the singing bird and what we can hear if we simply pause and take the time," says Don Kroodsma. "It's about moving beyond 'identifying' birds toward 'identifying with' them." *The Singing Life of Birds* is Don Kroodsma's passionate tour through the private lives of birds and the music of our singing planet.

About the Author

Donald Kroodsma, professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, has studied birdsong for more than thirty years. He was recognized as the "reigning authority on avian vocal behavior" in the citation for his 2003 Elliott Coues Award from the American Ornithologists' Union.

He has edited three scholarly volumes on the field of acoustic communication among birds, and written more than one hundred articles in both scholarly journals and popular magazines such as *Auk*, *Condor*, *Birder's World*, *Living Bird*, and *Natural History*. Kroodsma is a sought-after speaker on bird vocalizations.

Kroodsma majored in chemistry in college and discovered birds in a local Michigan marsh during his last semester. That summer he went to the University of Michigan field station in Pellston, taking beginning and advanced ornithology courses simultaneously. From there he traveled cross-country to Oregon State University for graduate school, where a singing wren in his backyard got him started on a lifelong passion for listening to birds.

The Singing Life of Birds is Kroodsma's first full-length book.