

TAPE REVIEW: *MORE BIRDING BY EAR*

by Patricia Fox

More Birding by Ear (Eastern and Central): A Guide to Bird Song Identification by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson. 1994. Boston: Houghton Mifflin (Peterson Field Guides). Three sixty-minute cassette tapes and instructional booklet. \$35. Also available in CDs.

I pause in the pasture listening...
Somewhere in the distance a bob-
white reiterates its name. I catch
the rippling warble of purple finches,
the clear whistle of a tufted tit-
mouse, and now, as I stand still
listening, the clatter of a kingfisher
over the pond.

Edwin Way Teele

When thinking about reviewing *More Birding by Ear*, I remembered my own beginning years of birding. Now this is happening to members of my family. The Walton and Lawson tapes are increasing their knowledge and their enjoyment.

My daughter, Ann, and her husband live on a six-acre wooded ridge in Ohio, south of Cleveland—not far from Point Pelee across Lake Erie. Their land, which is in a rural location on a migration route, has been designated by the National Wildlife Federation as a "Backyard Wildlife Habitat" (the Federation has no authority, but the designation is fun for the owners). Ann has become a birder, full of enthusiasm and good at the challenge.

Joan, another daughter, lives in upper Westchester County, New York, and she and her husband have become excited by the birds in their yard, although somewhat encumbered now by an infant. They play the tapes in the car coming to visit me in Lexington. "At home we go out on the porch and play them and try to figure out what we are hearing. The tapes are helpful and fun. The information has solved some of our bird mysteries."

Both daughters have what I would call "good ears" and sound retention. All three of us had Carolina Wrens in our yards last winter. They both had Red-bellied Woodpeckers. I get a call when they have a new species. Their pleasure is now my pleasure. They have finally realized that my avocation was not so weird after all.

When I learned about *Birding by Ear*, I had to own it, and I also had to give it to them. Ann asked for *More Birding by Ear* for more warbler clues, the songs, calls, and chips. She is well on her way to being a sharp birder. Now she

has the tools she needs.

I am delighted with her reports from Ohio: "My resident birds are covered in the first volume. When I go to work and play the tapes in the car, I enjoy the birds chirping at me. I can do more than half the blind identifications. The phonetic index in the booklet is a wonderful help and so is the way we are led through similar sounding groups. Learning bird song has made me want to find what is unfamiliar. I am much more attuned to hearing a different song or chirp and wondering what it is. (I am now annoyed by the sound of lawnmowers.) One warbler sounded to me as if it were blowing raspberries. (This turned out to be the *bee-buzz* of the Blue-winged Warbler.) My resident Carolina Wren does not sound like the tape."

I am no longer an active birder. I always had the tonal memory of a stone, although I am not hearing deprived. There are many bird songs I do not remember. For years I birded with Mary Baird who had extraordinary sound retention. I had the visual skills; she could name the singer.

Every spring I tried to review the warblers. I fiddled around with records, getting the parts I wanted on tapes using less than high-fidelity equipment. Many of the warblers I recorded I can only describe as the sound of "flub, flub, flub."

Walton and Lawson's *Birding by Ear* and *More Birding by Ear*, with their clear acoustics, would have been an ideal source for me. I took Dick Walton's Massachusetts Audubon Butterfly course, so I am familiar with what a good teacher he is. The recordings that he and Bob Lawson have created are what every neophyte birder should have. They are excellent to refresh one's memory on any level of birding.

More Birding by Ear is organized in the same format of the previous series—ninety species on three cassettes with comments by Dick Walton and a booklet that lists species with ample space for notes. Particularly welcome are twenty-five warbler species, divided as to buzzy, simple, two-parted, and complex. A comprehensive coverage of shorebird call notes and all the rails of North America are included along with the vocalizations of the *Empidonax* flycatchers, and a variety of other passerines, waterbirds, and terns. The last cassette offers groupings by habitat without identification. You are challenged to name the bird songs heard in special locations in Maine, Illinois, Virginia, New Jersey, South Carolina, and the Texas Gulf Coast, and an eastern birder's nirvana during migration, High Island, Texas.

As the name implies *More Birding by Ear* is the latest in a series of regional guides. Dorothy Arvidson wrote a knowledgeable and scientific review of the original *Birding by Ear* (*Bird Observer* 17(3):130-132, 1989). Bruce Hallett reviewed the second in the series, *Western Birding by Ear* (*Bird Observer* 20(1):29-30, 1992).

Our daughters and their husbands will have so much fun learning as their

birding horizons expand. Listening for birds and identifying the singer will make everywhere they go even more exciting. When I joined Pat Garrey's Massachusetts Audubon Birding Class more than thirty years ago, I had a whole new look at our surroundings, and I had no idea there were so many bird species in Massachusetts. Then I wanted to investigate other states and eventually other countries. Birding was a continuing adventure and will be so for them.

Ann and her husband are going to the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon National Park, and Zion National Park. They will take the tapes of *Western Birding by Ear*. What an advantage for them to go to a new venue with all that information and guidance. Next year they go to Florida. Is there a *Florida Birding by Ear* in the works? Let us hope that the Walton/Lawson creativity will continue with more *Birding by Ear* tapes for our instruction and enjoyment.

PATRICIA N. FOX no longer plays tennis or goes on birding trips. She is content with having seen more than a third of the world's bird species on six continents and is now happy with those in her yard or spied on the road. She takes a class, Writing for Yourself, and does the *New York Times* crossword puzzles. Her objective about birding is to promote the fun of it (along with some scientific knowledge) to her daughters and her son Peter Fox in California. They are all for Pete Dunne's admonition that we should take care there will be a habitat for birds in the next century.

Buying a used VW?
Complete Pre-purchase
Evaluation
Golf - Jetta - Quantum
\$50.

GT Shop
Inc.
(617) 923-0941

We service Nissan, Honda,
Saab, Toyota, VW, Volvo

106 Pleasant Street
Watertown Square

Formerly Coop Garage