

I soon found the nuthatches back in the white pines. As I was watching the male red-breasted nuthatch in the top of a pine, a female Blackburnian warbler boldly chased him out of the tree. She soon returned, and promptly settled into a compact cup-shaped nest located just a few feet from where the nuthatch had been feeding. The nest was 58 feet up, about 3 feet from the end of a 10-foot horizontal branch of a large white pine, located directly in front of one of the cabins. I had been hearing the male Blackburnian singing nearby for the past couple of days, and he was singing now, just a few white pines away. The female sat on the nest for 20-30 minute intervals, leaving to feed nearby for 5-10 minutes at a time.

The next morning I observed the male Blackburnian standing over the female in the nest, apparently feeding her. That day we spent that afternoon at Clear Creek, but not before finding another male Blackburnian warbler singing from the tall white pines along the rim at Conkle's Hollow.

Upon our return to the cabin area at dusk, we heard the male red-breasted nuthatch calling repeatedly from the dead snag tree. I followed him into the dense pines behind the cabins. Veronica stayed by the road, and it was lucky that she did. As I was peering up into the pine needles, she followed the male, who in turn was followed by a fledgling, right back to the red pine nest tree. They both fluttered around the nest hole, and then the male perched in a nearby shortleaf pine and called out with an incessant "wah-wah-wah-wah" for a full five minutes, as if calling the family home. At exactly 8:58 p.m. he disappeared behind a red pine adjacent to the nest tree; it contained several large cavities, and I suspect this was where he retired for the night.

This was our last night at the cabin. The next morning the female Blackburnian was still upon the nest as her mate sang his insect-like song nearby. I could still hear the four-noted begging calls of the fledgling nuthatches as we packed our things and locked up the cabin.

We bid adieu to Hocking Hills,  
And all its fragrant pines.  
White and red, shortleaf, and pitch,  
Each differing in design.  
Bark and cone and needle thin,  
Here's to the pines of Hocking Hills  
And the birds that nest therein.

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## Media Review

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#### Flight Calls of Migratory Birds: Eastern North American Land Birds.

William R. Evans and Michael O'Brien. 2002. Old Bird Inc. Multimedia CD-ROM. Audio recordings, spectrographic portrayals, and text information throughout. Slim, folding cardboard CD case. \$35, plus \$5 shipping from Old Bird, 605 W. State St. Ithaca, NY 14850. Online ordering is available at <www.oldbird.org> or contact <admin@oldbird.org> for more information.

Knowledge of flight calls separates many excellent birders from a smaller set of elite birders. While many a fine birder can distinguish the nocturnal calls of migrating *Catharus* thrushes, fewer can decipher the zeep complexes attributed to sparrows and wood-warblers. But who has time to stake out each species and learn to recognize seldom-heard flight calls? Michael O'Brien and Bill Evans, two among the elite set, had time. In fact, they have made it their business to record and describe these calls. Their long-anticipated release, a multimedia CD-ROM reference guide, breaks new ground in what promises to be an ever-expanding availability of information. It describes the flight calls (diurnal and nocturnal) of 211 species of landbirds that migrate through the eastern United States. Most of them ply the night skies over Ohio every spring and fall.

The CD-ROM is currently available in an html version that requires navigation using one's Internet browser and works on the widest variety of operating systems. The true CD-ROM version, due for release later this year, will cost the same and be slightly more user friendly, requiring only that one insert the CD and wait for an interactive menu to open. Researchers may be more interested in the html version, which allows access to the .wav files and the ability to create spectrograms. Minimum system requirements are an Internet browser (Netscape or Explorer), 32 MB RAM and a CD drive. Yes, that's all. Just about anyone with a computer should be able to enjoy this version. The graphics are minimal; backgrounds are pleasant, transparent "wallpapers" of O'Brien's creation.

The instructions for use are simple and clear. One should begin by referring to the Read Me file. This file explains how to open and run the CD-ROM. The authors make a few good suggestions here. Although the browsers have a default media player, they recommend PC users download Winamp, and Mac users the most recent version of Quick Time. Have the player open before accessing the sound files; otherwise the browser will open and close the player each time one selects a file, which slows down playback and browsing. Another useful suggestion is to run the player in the background (invisibly), accomplished by right clicking the player and selecting the proper visualization modes. It took me just a little time to figure out how to do this with Winamp. It was time well spent.

Enough computer talk? Sure, on to the meat of it. Using the CD-ROM is exactly like surfing the web. There are pages and links. One uses the links and the browser's back and forwards buttons to navigate. The Home Page (start page) has a list of links, the first of which (appropriately, because it will be most used) is the Species Index set in bold, followed by a set of links in smaller font. I strongly recommend beginning by selecting and reading the text of these smaller links sequentially. The links are as follows: an introduction to the purpose and history of the project; a definition and explanation of "flight call;" How To Use This Guide, which outlines the sections of each species page; Learning Flight Calls, a really good primer with excellent advice on how to listen to a flight call (and when and where to listen); a section on the general aspects of the audio recordings, which credits recordists and has links to two institutional sound archives; a section on spectrograms with detailed information on how the parameters are set and how to interpret them; a short history of nocturnal flight call monitoring; a glossary; a short section on phonetic representations; a references list; a species list of background animal noises; and, finally, acknowledgments.

The first four sections, Introduction through Learning Flight Calls, will be particularly interesting to those who have not journeyed into the world of flight calls and nocturnal migration. The Introduction describes the evolution of the authors' efforts, remarking that as their vision progressed, a treatment of nocturnal flight calls of thrushes, warblers, and sparrows expanded to include diurnal migrants known to occasionally migrate and vocalize at night. As the work progressed and the authors struggled to decide which species merited inclusion, it became apparent that a full treatment of flight calls, diurnal and nocturnal, was in order. They comment, "Specifically, we aimed to provide an archive of diurnal *flight calls* where the birds were visually identified in order to help confirm our recordings and tentative identifications of *flight calls* from unseen nocturnal migrants."

It is important to note, as the authors do in the next page "What is a Flight Call?" that the terminology is a matter of convenience. "The so-called *flight call* is given under a wide variety of circumstances," for example, while foraging or interacting with young. It remains, however, the primary call for flight; therefore, the convenience. Furthermore, it should be noted that many species give other vocalization during diurnal and nocturnal migration. Some species "are even prone to give short bursts of song during nocturnal migration."

In the Learning Flight Calls section one gets the first taste of the sound files. There are four sample files of nocturnal flight calls. Following the authors' recommendation, I was listening with headphones instead of my cheap computer speakers. Using headphones significantly improved the sound quality. Studio speakers would be even better. I listened to the first three calls (yellow warbler, palm warbler, and white-throated sparrow, fine examples of different, but related sounds) then was nearly deafened by the fourth (the much louder "pwee" of Swainson's thrush). This prompted me to be very careful with volume levels of the files on the species pages. Two other sections, the glossary and the section on spectrograms, become important as one begins to explore the species pages.

Delving into the species pages proves to be a lot of fun. From the Home Page, the Species Index links to a list of bird groups in taxonomic order. Select any one group and a species list (also in taxonomic order) appears. From any single page there are links to the Home Page and the Glossary, making for quick reference. A typical page begins with the bird's common and scientific name, and a brief description of the flight call. For example, the description for golden-crowned kinglet *Regulus satrapa* reads "A high, finely trilled 'seee' or a series of two to four 'see' notes all on one pitch. Also, a high, descending 'tsu'." Example spectrograms for each type follow. All spectrograms in the guide are "clickable," so one can hear what it looks like (vs. "see" what it sounds like). Herein lies one of the beauties of the guide. Associating visual and audio is a fantastic learning and memory device. For example, the spectrogram for Canada warbler nocturnal flight call shows a dramatic descent and ascent. It looks like a "V." Listening to the associated sound files, one can actually discern this fluctuation (which takes place in about 1/20<sup>th</sup> of a second). After the spectrograms of flight calls, each page continues with a series of diurnal calling sequences or a link to diurnal sequences. There are four for golden-crowned kinglet. The actual text of the link itself names the state or province, month, day, and year the recording was made, and ends with the recordist's initials in parenthesis. Normal text follows each link describing the circumstances of the vocalization (i.e., whether the bird was perched, foraging, or in flight). These four sequences range from 3 seconds to 20 seconds, typical for the guide. Break out those headphones. The first two diurnal sequences for the kinglet exemplify files with tremendous background noise. The high-pitched kinglet flight calls nearly disappear in the white noise of wind, microphone handling, and distant traffic. People with hearing loss (of high frequencies) will be challenged to discern these calls. While playing these files I experienced the only program bug I encountered during my sessions. When switching back from an open word document (this review) to the kinglet page and clicking the link for the first diurnal sequence, the flight calls folder and program closed while Winamp played the file. I could reliably reproduce this glitch by spending a few minutes in another program then returning to the CD-ROM. This happened at no other time during my sessions and only under these circumstances.

The species page for golden-crowned kinglet continues with a description of, and links to, similar species followed by notes on migration behavior. Those notes read, "Nocturnal migrant but engages in redetermined migration. Gives both call types in redetermined migration flight and in short diurnal flights. Only known to give the 'see' calls in night migration." Turning to the glossary from the link at the top of the page, I found a concise and referenced definition for redetermined migration. Fascinating. Next to the diurnal sequences, each species page has a link to nocturnal sequences. This link opens a page with "clickable" spectrograms. When the species is not known to give calls during nocturnal migration, this is noted in the Behavior section (as is the case with ruby-crowned kinglets).

Descriptions of individual sound files, both diurnal and nocturnal, include, when appropriate, notes on background noises. For example, the diurnal sequence for black-billed cuckoo notes song sparrow, Baltimore oriole, and "gypsy moth

larvae droppings striking leaves." One of the four series files for nocturnal flight calls of black-billed cuckoo reads, "Stereo cut with presumed ovenbird nocturnal flight call and distant chorus of green frogs."

There are a few species for which no known flight calls exist. Both loggerhead and northern shrikes each have a page of their own, but have no links and no information except a behavioral note that each is presumed to migrate primarily at night. It is not clear to me why these and other species not known to give flight calls merited inclusion in a reference guide for flight calls. The answer may lie in the fact that the authors freely acknowledge the novelty and incomplete nature of the available information. Or it may be that they found it best not to interrupt the taxonomic flow of all migratory landbirds of eastern North America by creating a separate list of these supposedly silent travelers. In some of these cases they have added discussion text. For example, the mourning dove page recognizes no known flight call, notes that the species migrates by day and night, and continues: "Although no vocalizations are given in flight, a distinctive wing whistle is often heard in flight during the day and has been heard from birds in nocturnal migration." For nine owl species, only two have sound files, barn owl and northern saw-whet owl, only one of which (barn owl) has a flight call. Another free admission of lack of confirming evidence lies in the extensive use of the word "presumed." It is a reminder that this guide is no definitive reference. The authors' two-fold intent, as stated in the introduction, is to provide not only a utility for advanced birders to increase their knowledge and enjoyment, but also to provide a "preliminary foundation" for further study of migration and bird populations.

For the advanced birder, the real challenge lies in applying this information this release provides in the field. When confronted with a suite of calls each between 50 and 100 milliseconds, only practice, patience, and familiarity will yield knowledge and enjoyment. This guide certainly provides the tools necessary to begin to untangle the web of seeps and zeeps, whistles and peeps that rain on a listener from the night sky. Whether this CD will be widely used as a research tool remains to be seen. Certainly any body of information is better and more stimulating than none at all. The body/focus of this work is truly unique. The authors deserve heaps of praise for their dedication, time and energy that culminated in this project. It is one of a kind and I suggest anyone interested in flight calls and nocturnal migration invest the 40 dollars before next migration. 🐦

## A Disastrous Trip

W. F. Henninger

*We reprint here a note from Rev. Henninger, a well-known birdman of the day, which appeared in The Wilson Bulletin (16:21-22) in 1904. Frank W. Langdon was a respected Cincinnati ornithologist, and W. Leon Dawson the author of The Birds of Ohio (1903). -Ed.*

For several years it had been the desire of the writer to visit the famous Port Clinton (Ottawa County, O.) marshes to explore the bird world at the same place where Langdon had been so fortunate in 1880\*. The afternoon of June 1<sup>st</sup> found me at Port Clinton, in a terrible rain and wind storm. Early the next morning found me out on the Portage River exploring the marshes for miles, then in the afternoon out on the Lake Erie waters. June 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>, on which day I was joined by Rev. W. Leon Dawson of Columbus, found me on Sandusky Bay, on the grounds of the Portage Gun Club and the Wynous Point Shooting Club. It was the same scene everywhere. The storm had carried the water higher inland than for the last eighteen years, and everything had been flooded. The only birds that had escaped destruction of their nests were the Red-winged Blackbird and the Long-billed Marsh Wren. All our searching was in vain. Not a Grebe, not a Least Bittern were seen, but few Coots and Gallinules heard. On Friday, Brother Dawson ascended the dizzy height of the water works tower at Sandusky, but as far as the eye could see, the waters spread over the Sandusky marshes. Under these conditions [*sic*] it was a wonder that any birds had escaped, and our record of sixty-six species noted during our three days' stay will still compare favorably with Langdon's ninety, as seen in 1880.

Of interest were only a troop of five Bonaparte Gulls and four Semi-palmated Sandpipers on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, several Black Terns and sixteen Turnstones, seen on June 4<sup>th</sup> on Sandusky Bay. The Turnstones were found on a newly planted cornfield, and it was a pretty sight to watch them turning over the clods and catching their prey. It was in the club house of the Wynous Point Shooting Club that we found the most interesting things, stored away in the collection of birds, and enabling Brother Dawson and myself to bring home at least a few noteworthy records from this disastrous trip.

The first was a specimen (sex unknown) of *Chen hyperborea nivalis*, shot in the fall of 1886.

2. Trumpeter Swan 1877 and White-fronted Goose, shot in the fall of 1868.
3. White-winged Scoter, shot in fall of 1881.
4. Peregrine Falcon, shot in fall of 1882, by Colonel E. A. Scoville.
5. A hybrid, between *Anas obscura* and *Anas boschas*, killed in the fall of 1878, by Judge E. B. Sadler.
6. A pure Albino Redhead, killed in fall of 1880.
7. A partial Albino Coot, and
8. A partial Albino Wilson's Snipe, both killed in the fall of 1881, by C. J. Clark.