

Researchers call out to lovers of bird song

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What happens when we hear a bird? That is the question at the heart of a new research project launched this week at the University of Aberdeen.

Over the next two years, researchers from the Department of Anthropology will be listening to birds to find out how their songs, calls and cries become a part of our lives.

The project 'Listening to birds: an anthropological approach to bird sounds' has received £200,000 of funding from the Arts and Humanities

Research Council.

"We are interested in understanding how people come to focus on particular sounds and how they develop the skill of identifying songs and calls," said Dr Andrew Whitehouse, the project's lead researcher. "We also intend to explore how bird sounds evoke time, place and season and how people experience and draw upon bird sounds in science, art, music and their everyday lives."

A number of research methods will be used by the Aberdeen anthropologists, who are keen to hear from anyone interested in birds across Britain and throughout the world.

"One thing I'll be exploring is how technology shapes the way we hear," added Dr Whitehouse. "For most people hearing is an activity we do unaided, but new digital technologies are making it much easier for people to record sounds. I'm interested in the effects this has on our interactions with birds.

"We want to hear from anyone with an interest in bird sounds or who has a story to tell about them. It could be a recent or distant memory; it could be about how you learnt to recognise a bird from the sounds it makes or a story associated with hearing a particular bird. You don't have to be a bird expert and you don't even have to know what sort of birds you heard."

The research team is also looking for volunteers in the Aberdeen area to take part in lessons during the spring in how to identify bird sounds. However, anyone who wants to submit details of a bird sound experience can do so on the project website - www.abdn.ac.uk/birdsong/

Dr Whitehouse will write a blog throughout the project charting the group's work and encouraging people to contribute.

"This is research that can really help us to understand how people experience their world through sound", added the project's director, Professor Tim Ingold. "It will show just how important birds are to people."

Source: University of Aberdeen

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