

Listen for the Quietest Sound

What's the quietest sound you can find?

Whether you're deep in the woods or in your own backyard, tuning into the quietest sound around you can enrich your outside listening experience. These tips work for indoor listening, too!

Find a special spot.

- Find somewhere you can sit comfortably for at least 20 minutes. Try a park bench or under a tree, or sit near an open window.
- *Listening takes time.* For best results, try returning to the same spot every day. The better you get to know the sounds of your listening spot, the more you'll be able to detect changes in the soundscape.

Sit in silence.

- By sitting still, you're allowing nearby animals (and people) to get used to your presence and scent—and eventually ignore you. Birds will return to making *songs* or *companion calls*, which means "business as usual."

Be aware of all of your senses.

- Tune in to the *farthest* sound you can find.
- Try listening in a 360-degree circle—in front, behind, and all around you.
- Listen for the *loudest* sound. Now tune that sound out and let the subtler, softer sounds surface. From a far off birdcall to the click of a beetle nestled in the ground, *soak in the soundscape*.

Listen for disturbances.

- From your listening spot, determine which way is north. Why might knowing your orientation be useful for regularly listening to birds?
- What different sounds do you hear at sunrise and sunset? Noon versus the middle of the night?
- Notice how changes in the weather affect the sounds you hear.
- How close can you get to singing birds without alarming them?

After you've listened in the same place for a few days, challenge yourself with these activities:

- Listen for sudden changes in the soundscape. Bird alarms might signal the presence of a predator, like a hawk or mountain lion.
- Notice your feelings as you hear a sound. Alarm calls can be as intense as a person yelling for help.

