Spring Bird Sounds, Golden Gate Audubon, February, 2021

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Purpose

The purpose of the class is to introduce you to the sounds many of the birds you would commonly encounter in Bay Area wildlands in the spring. We will study about 30 species.

Strategy

The list of birds we'll study is on the first page of the Class Slides (the link is on my website). They are arranged in no particular order except my estimate of how likely we would be to hear them on a walk. We'll take several imaginary walks through some local parks and study the birds we might encounter as we go.

All of the birds we'll study are in the order Passeriformes, and are thus considered "singing" birds. However, the flycatchers (family Tyrannidae) are "suboscines," and thus have less complex vocal mechanisms than all the other birds on the list, which are "oscines," i.e., songbirds. A short discussion of singers vs. non-singers is at the end of this doc. on page 4.

Everybody learns bird sounds differently: by rote, by studying sonograms, by memorizing mnemonics, etc. You will probably not learn many vocalizations by only listening to the one-minute recordings in this class, so I suggest taking lots of notes and using them and the other materials here to become familiar with your avian neighbors. And please have fun. Bird sounds are delightful; the study of them should be, as well.

Class Schedule

Three sessions all running from 7:00 to approximately 8:15pm:

- Wed., Feb. 17
- Tues, Feb. 23
- Thurs, Feb. 25

Field Trips?

None, due to C19. We encourage you to go out on your own and listen to the birds. We will offer recommendations about how, where, etc.

Sources

Class Materials I've posted the class PowerPoint slides and this document as pdf files on my website here:
http://diablosteve.yolasite.com/spring-bird-sounds-class.php

Text Most explanatory text was taken verbatim from the great Cornell site https://www.allaboutbirds.org/, which also has sounds and ID tips, and its companion site https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-learn-bird-songs-and-calls/ (no registration is required).

Sounds Most of the sound files are from the California Bird Songs digital recordings (Cornell/Macaulay Laboratory). A few were recorded directly off the Cornell website

References

Denise Wight's Xeno-canto sound recordings are here:
https://www.xeno-canto.org/contributor/UVAHIPJUXZ
(In case you don't know her, Denise is a long-time ear-birding teacher for GGAS and a wonderful person.)

For a deep dive into bird vocalizations, we recommend Nathan Pieplow's *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Western North America* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

All of the sound files referred to in the Pieplow book may be found here:
https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/peterson-field-guide-to-bird-sounds/ (no registration required).

Need to ID a Bird Song? Try BirdNET from the Cornell Lab: https://birdnet.cornell.edu/api/. It seems to be quite accurate, but requires uploading the sound file to their website, which is a little cumbersome.

Sound Software I'm using Raven Lite (free from Cornell) or Audacity (also free) to manipulate and play the sound files:
http://ravensoundsoftware.com/software/raven-lite/
http://audacityteam.org/

Audubon Climate Status The Audubon climate status for the individual species as shown on the PowerPoint slides comes from the California summary prepared as part of Audubon's "Survival By Degrees" climate change study:
https://nas-national-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/briefs_ca_final.pdf
GGAS has a strategic initiative to mitigate climate change, hence my inclusion of the Climate Status on these slides.

Hearing Resources Many of us have some hearing loss. If you do, but aren't ready for hearing aids, you might consider some lower-priced ($50–$400) alternatives:

Bose Hearphones: From my personal experience, quite useful, but somewhat annoying to use in the field.

Nuheara IQ Buds: I have no personal experience with these.

Reizen Mighty Loud Ear: Helpful, basic, and cheap, from my personal experience.

Zoom

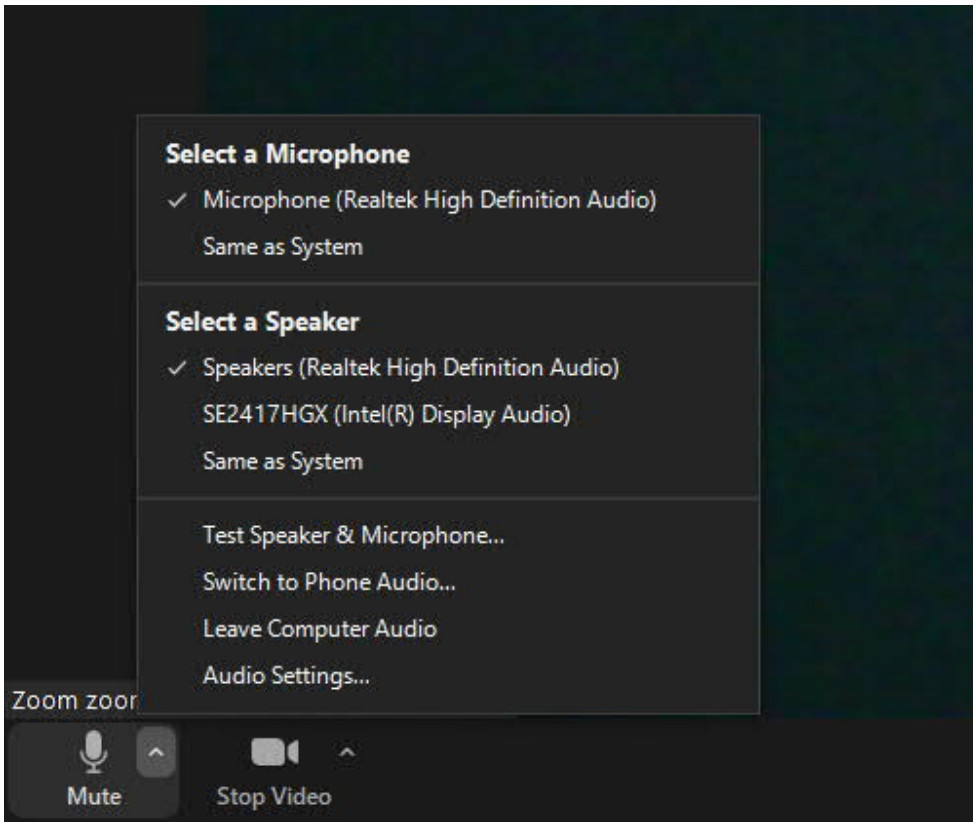
I will email you a Zoom invitation before the first meeting.

What will you need to do to log in?
You will need to download the Zoom app: https://zoom.us/download#client_4meeting
We'll be Zooming using GGAS's Zoom account.
You'll need to open your Zoom app at the prompt.
You'll also need to enter the meeting password, which is included in the invitation.

If you have trouble getting into the meeting, call me on my cell phone, 925/785-0130

Join the meeting using Computer Audio. I suggest that you do the speaker and microphone tests before the meeting.

What might you need to do during class?
Find the Mute and Stop Video icons. They are located on the lower left side of the Zoom screen, which you can open by hitting the ALT key.



While we're playing recordings, I'll ask that you Mute your microphone by clicking on the microphone icon (at the lower left on our PC screen).

You may also need to shut off your video camera (by clicking on the "Stop Video" icon) if you have a bandwidth problem and your presentation becomes slow or jerky. Note that this will only shut off your camera. You will still be able to see other participants.

My experience is that the audio and video get out of sync sometimes. If this happens to you, try disconnecting from the computer audio momentarily and then reconnecting (click on “Leave Computer Audio” on the Mute icon menu – see above).

“Singing” vs. “non-singing”

Birds in the taxonomic order Passeriformes are considered to be “singing” birds.
They have evolved brains and singing mechanisms that allow them to sing long, complex songs.

This order is split between the “Oscines” (i.e., “songbirds”) and the “Suboscines,” (birds that don’t sing as well). Of the Passeriformes on our list, only the new world flycatchers are Suboscines. (On our list: Western Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Pacific-slope Flycatcher). All the other Passeriformes are Oscines, advanced singers.

Birds in the other, older, orders, such as the doves in the order Columbiformes, are considered to not be singers. You’re probably aware that the so-called non-singers use fewer notes and less complicated vocalizations than the Passeriformes, although most of the non-singers are capable of making plenty of noise with the tools they have.