

## **Refuge Refrains:**

### **Sounds of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge (ARNWR) ( Maynard, Stow, and Sudbury, Massachusetts )**

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HylaTunes #101 CD Audio 15 tracks, 68 minutes.

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### **About the recording...**

The recordings on this disk were made at various times during 2010 and 2011. Most recordings were made unattended. The obvious advantage of an unattended recording is that there is no human presence to interfere with the wildlife being recorded. A more interesting advantage is that sometimes the recording includes unexpected elements.

The equipment used in the field is basic and pocket sized: A Zoom H2 portable digital recorder, sometimes using its internal microphone, and sometimes with an inexpensive external Sony stereo electret microphone. Many hours of recordings were made at various points on the Refuge and along the adjacent Assabet River. These field recordings were later explored, edited, and enhanced using various inexpensive PC-based tools, to yield the 68 minutes on this disk.

All recordings were made on the ARNWR, or immediately adjacent to it along the Assabet River in Maynard and Stow, except for track 2, which was recorded about a half mile from the refuge on the Maynard/Stow line.

### **Track by track...**

[ 1 ] *Winter becomes spring: snowmelt, wood frogs, and peepers.* The winter of 2010-2011 dropped a heavy snowfall on the Refuge, and was still on the ground in places late in March, leading to abundant melt water. This track consists of four separate recordings which flow into each other. The first is water draining from a culvert between two wetlands along White Pond Road, late March 2011. The second is the sound of unusually high water, also along White Pond Road. The third is a recording of wood frogs in the marsh between Petapawag Trail and Patrol Road, March 2010. Wood frogs are the earliest frogs heard in wetlands in

this area, appearing well before the more commonly heard spring peepers. The final recording contributing to this track is from the pond along the N side of Patrol Road, a bit SE of its intersection with White Pond Road, in the southern section of the Refuge, early in April 2011. The spring peepers are just beginning to join the wood frogs. The sound at 0:55 on this track is a gust of wind catching the microphone.

[ 2 ] ***Grey Tree Frogs.*** Grey tree frogs can be heard in the distance on other tracks on this disk, but I never got a really good grey tree frog recording on the Refuge. But this healthy population just a half mile from the Refuge, on the Maynard/Stow town line, was too good to pass up. Grey tree frogs begin calling on warm humid days in May or occasionally April, and can continue into July. Grey tree frogs are loud, and en mass, present an otherworldly sound.

[ 3 ] ***A Dawn Chorus: birds and frogs in a wetland early on a May morning.*** Can't sleep at about 4:30am on a spring morning? In all but the most urban environments, you've probably heard the "dawn chorus" of birds. This recording was made along Winterberry Way, just past where the pavement ends and there is marsh on both sides, NE of the canoe launch, on a day in late May 2011. Since this is a wetland area, bullfrog choruses, and the "glunk" of green frogs are also heard throughout. If you aren't sure what these frogs sound like, you'll find a green frog at 0:20, and a loud bull frog at 0:26. This track is edited from audio snapshots taken over the course of several hours, compressing the sounds of a whole morning into just under six minutes.

You may just want to relax and enjoy the growing mix of bird calls over the six minutes of this track. But if you want to identify some of them, the following guide keyed to minutes and seconds in the track may be of help. You may even hear more birds than I've identified here.

As usual, the first bird to sing is a Robin. At about 0:40, our Robin is joined by other birds. In this mix, we can hear a Northern Cardinal (rising whistle at 0:58, also at 1:25, for example). At 1:44 the falling two note sound of the White-capped Chickadee begins. A Tufted Titmouse joins the fray at 1:47, with his "reader, reader, reader" call. At 2:02, what sounds like a Common Yellowthroat starts up, and sings throughout the rest of this track. Its possible this bird is a Carolina Wren. There is much variability in the calls of both species, though my hunch is that we are hearing a Yellowthroat.

At about 3:30, things get more complicated. The newly entered characters almost certainly include a Grey Catbird, and there may also be European Starlings and

Common Grackles.

Loud Red-winged Blackbirds enter at about 5:00. The first call heard is the loud one-note "seer" call. Then at 5:17 the more recognizable "conk-ra-lee" call is heard.

- [ 4 ] ***A Springtime evening: delightful cacophony of scolding birds and rodents.*** Chipmunks and Red Squirrels have joined the birds this evening, and seem to have an argument going on. Behind the chattering of the squirrels and chipping of the chipmunks are probably no bird species we haven't already heard, except for a Rufous-sided Towhee who enters about 1:45, far below the noisier characters. Also, there may be a Common Grackle or Grey Catbird in here.

The area around the Refuge is very active with aircraft, and on a fine spring evening, recreational ultralights and other craft abound overhead. The loud, low plane that enters from the right at about 2:46 is hard to ignore. It's a simple reality of a Refuge in this area, that many sounds from outside the Refuge are part of its aural environment. Aircraft are typically the loudest and most prevalent, though road noise contributes to the background of some tracks.

The quietest time in the Refuge is in the winter, at the dead of night. But even then, the sound of aircraft emerge. Airliners, at 30,000 feet or more, which might never be noticed visually, are present to the ears against a background of silence. As many as 4 or 5 airliners at cruising altitude may pass overhead within the span of an hour, all quite audible in the deepest part of the night, at the quietest time of the year.

Finally, if you listen carefully to the last couple minutes of this track you'll hear the gentle downward spiraling vibraphone call of a Veery, far in the background. It seems to get closer, and is more audible in the final minute of the track.

- [ 5 ] ***An evening thundershower in June.*** Here you can enjoy a few minutes of a fine spring thundershower without getting wet. If you have an audio system with a good sub-woofer, the thunder will sound great. The microphone is in the woods, and you will hear raindrops slapping nearby foliage as the shower builds.
- [ 6 ] ***The Refuge awakens to a damp morning after the thundershower.*** Bullfrogs and green frogs seem to relish a damp morning in early June near the intersection of Harry's Way and Towhee Trail. A Robin, a Chickadee, and a Red-winged Blackbird are audible early on. At 1:39, a Wood Thrush adds a special delicacy to this natural tone-salad, as breezes shake drops from the foliage.

Like track 3, this is a compressed dawn chorus sequence. At 4:43, a Red-winged Blackbird, and a Common Yellowthroat, or perhaps Carolina Wren join the chorus, this section of the track being actually somewhat later in the morning.

The thrush has receded, and at 6:35, quietly and in the background, a Rufous-sided Towhee can be heard. Around 6:45, another new song, perhaps a Baltimore Oriole. Lest we forget we are near water, at 7:10 something makes a very audible splash. At 7:35 a Veery appears, and at 8:10 Blue Jays make their two-syllable call on a single note. By 9:30, showers have resumed in earnest.

[ 7 ] ***Evening of 15 June 2011: a woodpecker and a distant celebration.*** Another spring evening, graced by the drumming of a woodpecker. The Downy Woodpecker is the most common, so as a guess, this is probably a Downy. This recording is from later in the evening, so there are few birds. But a surprise is heard at 0:56 into this track: distant explosions originating from somewhere beyond the bounds of the Refuge. The Boston Bruins have just won the Stanley Cup, and its likely someone is celebrating with fireworks.

[ 8 ] ***A June morning on the Refuge: bullfrogs, birds, bugs, and bells.*** This track opens with a brief bullfrog chorus, and a fine splash of something at 0:57. A bird which is probably a Common Yellowthroat, and also perhaps an Oriole joins a Robin at 1:30, followed by Red-wing Blackbirds in the distance, and Mourning Doves. At 1:51 we learn that this recording takes place at 5:00am, as the Clock Tower Place bell in Maynard chimes five times. This recording was made along Taylor Way in the northern part of the Refuge, where the bell tower is easily heard, along with background road noise, even at this early hour.

A nearby Tufted Titmouse makes its "near, near" or "reader, reader, reader" call at 3:13. A different variation of the Titmouse call, which whistles upward rather than downward occurs at 3:53. A woodpecker joins in at 4:55, along with Mourning Doves, which are heard often on this track.

No trip to the woods in June is complete without mosquitoes. One seems intent on investigating my microphone at 5:30. If you're wearing headphones, he'll be buzzing around your head, and you'll be tempted to swat this guy.

[ 9 ] ***An Early fall evening: Chipmunks, squirrels, tree crickets.*** The woods are always in a state of change. The rich birdsong of May and June is much reduced by mid-July, and some time early in August, the background tone of the woods begins to change. This evening recording from mid-September 2010 opens with nothing

more than a solitary chipmunk chattering. At 0:41 a background of chipmunks clucking or chucking is heard behind red squirrels and more chipmunks. As a plane passes, nearby Blue Jays squawk, concluding this track. Recent years have been "mast years" in this area, with oaks producing an abundance of acorns. This has led to a larger than usual population of chipmunks and squirrels.

- [ 10 ] ***The Gashawk in Autumn.*** I've commented already on recreational aircraft. We'll lay this topic to rest by giving a small plane undivided if brief attention as it buzzes the refuge.
- [ 11 ] ***Autumn evening ambiance: katydids, tree crickets, and an owl.*** Fall evenings in the woods are marked by the simmering, sleepy sound of tree crickets, punctuated by the regular rhythm of katydids' three-syllable call. My intention was for this to be an extended and soothing track of just that. But nature has its surprises. At 3:23, an owl lets out a yelp. I think this is a barred owl which was disturbed by something. It calls briefly again at 4:25. The barred owl is the owl most commonly heard on the Refuge. If anyone has further ideas about this call, or anything on this disk, please email me at [hylatunes@daslied.com](mailto:hylatunes@daslied.com).
- [ 12 ] ***A lone goose visits the Assabet River on an October night.*** Late on an October night a lonely and loud Canada Goose visits the Assabet River. I think he can be heard splashing down at 0:11. His honking, which continued somewhat longer than what appears this track, seems to awaken a few other creatures nearby which respond with high squeaking and chattering.
- [ 13 ] ***Barred Owl, wee hours of a September morning.*** This is the classic song of the Barred Owl, often represented as, "who cooks for you, who cooks for you-all".
- [ 14 ] ***Another Autumn owl call.*** Listen patiently, as he spaces each call by several seconds. This is yet again a Barred Owl.
- [ 15 ] ***Coyotes Howl.*** Eastern Coyotes are common on the Refuge. They often travel on the major roads and trails, where their scat is often seen. Unfortunately, they seemed never to vocalize near my microphones. My recording has captured coyotes on or near the Refuge, howling magnificently if distantly.

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