

**Alan Powers: author/zoömusicologist/poet/composer**



Alan Powers.

Alan Powers wrote a book on avian and human language (2003. *BirdTalk: Conversations with Birds*. Berkeley: Frog).



**Alan writes:** "The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other modes of speech, very elliptical; little is said, but much is meant and understood" (Gilbert White, *Natural History of Selborne*, 1788, ed. Mabey 1977). I still daily hear new variants on the familiar talk of the Titimice, White-Throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Robins, Wood Thrush, Cardinals, and Orioles on the country roads I walk (usually reading in Italian, Russian, French and Latin classics). I see this reciprocity and respect of other species, especially for me birds, as the bottom line: though banding and transmitters have increased our knowledge, they intrude on birdlife. Our technical recording of birds, like Kroodsma's rich panoply, do not help us learn what they know—and we need to. But recordings do inform us, inductively, about bird ideas of beauty.

I have urged our national Audubon Society to challenge our poisonous obsession with chemicals and lawns, which devastate critters. A lawn is not inherently beautiful, but a learned aesthetic. My neighbors poison fields to discourage prickly vines upon which ground-nesting birds depend. We have consequently lost our nesting Woodcocks—and most species of ground-feeding birds, with the subsequent rise in tick-bred Lyme disease. (Shakespeare mentions Woodcock behavior in *Twelfth Night* 4.2.56ff.) A friend's cockatoo can imitate my laugh perfectly, payback from my life of imitating timbre and varying birdtalk.

We have failed as the Judeo-Christian guarantors of other species. We are the Proud Species, and our pride blinds us to what we can learn from other species. From birds I have learned about predation (warnings) and weather, about elation and plangent mood, about virtuosity, about quartertones and glissandos, varying for individuality as in jazz (see Len Howard's *Birds as Individuals*). Curiously, even the most melodic birds aspire to being drummers, and they are really a different drummer. Maybe their youth leads to drumming. Despite the couple dozen fine recent books on bird vocalization, I still turn to Schuyler Matthews and Simeon Cheney, and even White (above). I love to talk with European Blackbirds, and when I can get high-pitched enough, Robins. Messaien has helped the world to hear what they are saying, as does Hollis Taylor and her colleagues.



Alan Powers notating birdsong in Italy.

3 goshawks in car park across road.

Great chicken, ham + mushroom pie + Sweet Pudd (I mustn't say any more -- Day, about to leave) I let 'em off to climb to St Catherine's. I don't past the Thatcher (straw!) to Chert Overlook, take glasses.

Home, letter from "Center for Cognitive Studies" - then Guy, w/ blue article on godwin in VT. w/ 300, 30 in his house.

En, nap, rush again, w/ 5:48 from - Catch 6:48. Att., long word after, w/ 2 for abundance just - bang muscles gorge into strong bottle/ drink

Marie gives £20 for gift - £25-22)

15 May Thurs. 33

5 AM. Arrive in town (1st of trip)

At Weymouth (100000) phone Mrs. Heidi Gale - who talked w/ w/ 5 min

Meet at Weymouth Larry across a hill with in evening Mrs. on street place names.

4 PM - 1st trip sun

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mid night. Make another hole in my belt - take it in! HURRY - my sabbatical goal almost reached.

FRIDAY - After bacon + toast at Oasis (w. colin - meet borders for Gloucestershire - One named Verity Small - they show me a Goshawk - white - and a Lark - "Northern Oriole" See Deer next to court of Lord's manor

30+26 Drive to Portland, bt. Brannicca not there.

WALK to Chert Beach - a bit like Roman in Dunes - But a marvelous sun, the serenity of the receding waves, smoothie seems so calming. Signs, electric (?) fence protecting Little Terns.

Off cover I lost my dark blue shirt (don't round wash - prob as I chucked sweater) - walk back a bit of it's just over the crest, so no huge descent. Bark at large lot. Lunch/tea. White of the whole Dart, an old Weymouth Park in center.

← Gilbert with 33 - Common lark assemble in spring in sunshine. form on a gentle charge. (as if they were abt. to break up) winter swallows? Swifts do congregate w/ - gentle twittering before they make their respective departures.

bird in sun, Hardy's cottage

Robin

Like Ann Goldfrank, bt. more forceful pip-pip.

Thanklike: (see near Ann's)

Robin on (see counter) was like (1st next)

From the birdsong notebook of Alan Powers.

**Links**

<http://www.habitableworlds.com/pages/birdtalk.html>

<http://www.ululate.com>

Alan incorporates some of his transcriptions into jazz heads.

DURSES (BLACKSIA) A POWERS

RIFF

C- D7b9

B° C- D- G7

C- C° C- Bb ETC

ORLINO ALAN POWERS

♩ = 120

AB TRITONE

Ebm7 Ab6-5

Ebm7 Ab6-5

Ebm7 Ab6-5

BRIDGE

Ebm7 Ab6-5 A7-5 D7

G-7 G°/Db C° C-7 Ebm7 FADE