

**a j mithra: musician/composer/
conservationist/zoömusicologist**



a j mithra recording birdsong on his mobile phone in the Nanmangalam Reserve Forest, Chennai, India.

a j writes: I am a music teacher and amateur birder. Composing music using natural birdcalls and other animal sounds is my passion. I use them to create awareness on bird biodiversity and ecological issues among my students (at MCC Campus Matriculation School in Chennai, India). I play keyboard, guitar, and violin, and am a title-holder in Indian music in vocal and violin. I have founded a trust, "Thooral Foundation," to create awareness on ecological issues among students in particular.

Excerpts from "BIRDS n MUSIC" by a j mithra:

Birds have never been to a university, but the fact is that most of the universities around the world are behind birds and are learning new things about them everyday. Out of all that we can learn from birds, the most amazing is their singing, both birds' calls and songs...

A small Sunbird's call can be heard as far as 300 to 400 meters. According to ornithologists, if such a bird was to be as big as a human and sing, this would equate to being heard as far away as three to four kilometers...



Purple-rumped Sunbird

The syncopation of bird songs has intricate patterns and most of them are new to men. They sing very short phrases compared to human singing, but their syncopation has complicated but complete rhythmic patterns...



Plain Wren



Atherton Scrub Wren

Birds like the Plain Wren, Atherton Scrub Wren, Carolina Wren, and even Common Babblers sing complicated

rhythmic patterns like a seasoned jazz player. Most composers avoid composing in 5/8 meter because of its limitations, as well as the complications involved in the execution of it.



Carolina Wren



Common Babbler

But I have heard a Rustic Bunting's call sing in a 5/8 rhythmic pattern (from the Macaulay Library, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <http://macaulaylibrary.org/index.do>). I felt so small in front of this little bird when I heard that song. How is it possible for this bird to sing in such a complicated rhythmic pattern?



Rustic Bunting

There are birds like the Malabar Whistling Thrush, which is considered one of the best bird singers. Birdcall specialists say that you would mistake its singing for a human whistling a song—but that statement shows our human ego. I

feel that the song of the Malabar Whistling Thrush or any other bird on planet earth is original—no comparisons, please! Each bird's songs are special, and they must know that too.



Malabar Whistling Thrush



Slate-colored Bou Bou

An African bird called the Slate-colored Bou Bou has a sound that resembles the woodblock, a percussion instrument that originated in Africa. Maybe the Africans were inspired by the bird's call. There are tales after tales that say how man was inspired by the songs of nightingales and sparrows and cuckoos.

Excerpt from "Music, the Language of Birds" by a j mithra:

I always feel that birdsongs are not just songs—they are the language of the survived used for their survival. If a male bird did not know how to sing, he would surely end up staying a bachelor all his life. Without a mate, there would be no reproduction, and without reproduction, the world would end up in chaos. Birds are not *just* birds; they act as major seed sowers, scavengers, pest controllers, and, above all, they act as indicators of our environmental standard. When the bird population decreases, we know that environmental pollution has increased. Hence, birdsongs are not just songs; they are the language that expresses our very survival.



a j mithra on a bird walk with school kids at the 365-acre tropical dry evergreen forest on the campus of Madras Christian College, Chennai, India. A few students took their parent's cell phone to record birdcalls. They will soon create a music piece with the recordings.

Links

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-V8TqGmlBI>

aj writes: The rapid decrease of Indian tigers touched my heart. Tigers live in places with access to fresh water and are the fulcrum of ecological balance. Without them, their prey (such as deer) would clear all the forest greenery. I wanted to create an awareness of these big cats among school kids. While doing the track, I found that the tigers roared in perfect rhythm, and I could hear a definite pitch in their roar.

http://www.greencitizens.net/ngocorner/ngo.php?ngo_id=32

For more information on the Thooral Foundation.

<http://ajmithra21.wordpress.com>

For the full articles "Birds n Music" and "Music, the Language of Birds."

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/celebration/community/aj-mithra>

He adapted birdsong to accompany bird animations by Nancy Landrum, including *Magpie Rockers*, *Rockin Rustic Bunting*, and *Bach Meets Baltimore Oriole*.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ajmithra?feature=mhee>

http://www.greenteacher.org/?page_id=278