

Voices of Sister Birders: Podcasts

BRYONY ANGELL



Georgia Silvera Seamans and Lohan Beausoleil, of Your Bird Story.

I miss my birding girlfriends during this season of COVID. Female friendship is gold in the birding community, strengthened by a shared love for wild birds and the outdoors. I long to traipse in the field, cracking jokes and sharing stories with birding pals as we angle for views of ducks from a blind or stop to marvel at the jewel of a ruby-crowned kinglet dancing in a shrub beside us.

But birding during the pandemic is, by necessity, mostly a solitary experience, much to

the frustration of this sociable extrovert. So, I've turned to birding podcasts, in particular those hosted by females, to reclaim the company of my sister birders' voices.

I've rounded up my favorites here with qualifications based on my personal motivations and expectations. I want to listen to podcasts that reflect the diversity of our birding community, that teach or entertain me, and that *deliver*: The host must fulfill her intent for the show, and she must

do it *every single* episode. (Does this sound familiar, birder? We have high expectations!)

That being said, the intentions of these collected shows are different; their hosts and guests diverse in age, race, class, and nationality; the durations and content varied; and the opportunity ripe to find just what you want to hear, when you want to hear it, bird-enthusiast speaking.

As a collection, these five podcasts form the future of the birding scene: one that is inclusive, diverse, welcoming, family-friendly, and outwardly oriented so as to engage any audience, not just birders. I'm sure you'll find a new friend voice among these hosts and their guests. I have!



Out There with the Birds

Did you know this very magazine has a podcast? *Out There with the Birds* is now hosted by the women of *Bird Watcher's Digest*: publisher Wendy Clark, editor Dawn Hewitt, and ad sales director Kelly Ball. The show covers the birding world through conversations and

in-depth interviews with personalities (including Wendy's 2019 companions on an all-woman-guest-and-crew birding tour in Colombia), coverage of upcoming birding events and developing trends, and tips from "the inside" of birding media.

A memorable recent episode featured Dawn recounting her tenure as editor of the magazine from recruitment by Bill Thompson, III, to her trick for selecting the best bird photos (the bird's eye must be in focus, people!). If you want to know the inner workings of birding commerce and how bird lovers support themselves advancing bird conservation, this show features everyone from guides to optics experts to authors to *BWD* columnists to social justice advocates within the community.



Laura Erickson's For the Birds

Laura began her show as a radio broadcast in 1986 and continues recording weekly. In typical 5- to 10-minute episodes, she addresses a current topic or season and its relation to birds, with a special knack for discussing "the birds and the bees" of bird life with her droll midwestern delivery. Thanks to Laura, I know

Laura Erickson.



(much to my 10-year-old son's delight) that birds do not fart.

While all of her topics are bird-related, she purposely shares her opinion on political and social issues that impact birds and the birding community. From local and federal threats to birds, to threats to birders themselves and the resulting Black Birders Week, she advocates for both the birds and their enthusiasts.



The Bird Sh*t Podcast

Laura Erickson's reach includes the millennial co-hosts of *The Bird Sh*t Podcast*, Mo Stych and Sarah Bloemers, who hosted Laura on their "Badass Birding Stories from Laura Erickson" episode. The show name and episode titles should give you an idea of the flavor of Mo and Sarah's show: irreverent.

"Mo and I started *Bird Sh*t* because we couldn't find a birding podcast that talked about birds in the way we wanted to learn about them, which was not through a specific birding experience but about the birds themselves," says Sarah. They deliver hour-long shows about twice a month alternating between "the kind of bird info you could share at a cocktail party" and thoughtful and immersive interviews, the most notable being with Corina Newsome in the episode "From

Mo Stych and Sarah Bloemers.



the 'Hood to the Marsh," discussing racism in the birding and scientific communities.

Mo and Sarah are currently taking a break from the podcast to separately welcome motherhood into their birding experience—a topic I hope they'll include when they resume their show.



Always Be Birdin'

Twenty-something Samantha DeJarnett is the first Black woman host of a birding podcast.



Samantha DeJarnett.

And her experience as a Black woman in a mostly white pastime is the theme of her show.

“When I am out there, looking at birds and having the best day ever... and living in my own joy, that this is the biggest and most radical act of protest that I can do as a Black woman during times where it is so hard for BI-POC (Black, indigenous, persons of color) people to experience joy,” she says.

And she’s serious about that joy! Sam’s voice and enthusiasm for her new passion (she describes herself as a “novice baby birder”) is infectious, and her experience as a professional wildlife rehabber brings a distinct angle to her narrative. She’s a gifted and funny storyteller, building tension naturally in mostly unscripted but well-edited episodes. She is literally “changing the narrative,” as she says, of who is birding.



Your Bird Story

Host Georgia Silvera Seamans and show writer Loyan Beausoleil, co-founders of Washington Square Park Eco-Projects in New York City, have gathered stories



Georgia Silvera Seamans and Loyan Beausoleil.

from everyday bird enthusiasts living in cities. Their spin is a bird story—a person’s story about a single bird species (cardinal and summer tanager are two examples) within a shared urban space. Each episode is a story told by a guest (with thoughtful prompts by Georgia) of an interaction with birds, with space allowed for historical, spiritual, mythological, as well as scientific connections. “My interest in social-ecological relationships is evergreen, and I try to make this web a part of my projects,” Georgia said. The result is a contemplative, relaxed audio walk through an urban park.

“Another way in which *Your Bird Story* stands out in the field of birding podcasts is that the host is a Black woman,” Georgia said. “I am a non-traditional voice on the air, and I want to

use the podcast as a platform to broadcast the voices and stories that aren’t part of the mainstream bird world.”

These five podcasts are but a sample of the birding podcasts out there—*Bird Calls Radio*, *The Casual Birder*, and *Women Birders (Happy Hour)* are also hosted by women, among others. If you’re missing the banter of birding companions, this roundup may give you a good start in catching up on that energy. My need for sisterhood in birding is satisfied for now in listening to these diverse voices keeping the community’s song alive. *A*

Bryony Angell writes and birds from western Washington state. Birding culture is her beat; read more of her work at bryonyangell.com.