



The Sound Tracker

You are listening to the sound of a water ouzel.



Gordon Hempton, also known as the Sound Tracker, records the sounds of silence in the Kalahari Desert of South Africa.

Hempton's work takes him around the world collecting natural sounds for use in professional audio services. He records these sounds using a head-shaped stereo-separated microphone named "Fritz."

Gordon Hempton



Natural sounds are a rich natural resource important to ecological communities.

Research in bio-acoustics (bio=life, acoustics=sound) is a significant tool for defining the health of natural habitats.

Acoustic Ecology

You are listening to the sounds of grouse on the prairie.



Photo by Gordon Hempton

Natural soundscapes are valuable resources which may include the sound created by wind, flowing water, crashing waves, mammals, birds, insects, and other biological and physical components.

Natural ambient sound is heard in the absence of human-produced noise. This is sometimes called natural quiet.

Natural Soundscapes

Rialto Beach at Olympic National Park, Washington.



Photo by Gordon Hempton

The ear is shaped like a musical instrument.

When listening in the wild, look for objects that resemble the shapes of ears and musical instruments. Listen to how the sound quality changes as you approach hollow tree trunks, cliff bases, and forest clearings.

The characteristics of these objects and places increase your hearing abilities by extending the shape of your outer ear.

Listen Up!

You are listening to an ocean soundscape with lapping water.



Photo by Gordon Hempton

Cliff dwelling ancestral Puebloans once lived inside natural parabolas.

These rock structures collect sound and focus it at one point. The focus is frequently the communal fire pit and gathering place that, no doubt, served many useful purposes.

People and Sound

Cultural sounds include the music and language of indigenous people.



Photo by Rex Rystedt

Hempton records sounds along the Mississippi River.

A captivating world of sound exists in the wild. Some places stir with orchestrations of birdsongs. Others remain so quiet, you can hear your heart beat.

Find a place to appreciate natural sounds and try to understand how your presence affects natural sound environments. Make an effort to blend into the environment by keeping still or sitting at the base of a tree with one knee bent.

Listen to the Landscape

You are listening to the sounds of American toads.



This is a Sitka spruce log on Rialto Beach in Olympic National Park. This type of wood is the preferred wood for violin crafting.

Here on the beach, the acoustic energy from the surf excites the long wood fibers and creates a musical experience.

Natural Music

You are listening to the sounds around Sitka spruce driftwood on the beach.



When you track sounds in the wild, minimize your own human noise.

Wear clothing made without noisy synthetic fabrics, Velcro, and snaps. Dress more warmly than you would if you were walking faster. Turn off your wristwatch alarm or leave your watch behind in a safe place.

Sound Tracking

You are listening to the sounds of a creek.



Walk slowly and smoothly when you are enjoying natural sounds. Wildlife may interpret jerky movements or sneaky actions as predatory behavior.

Avoid eye contact if you encounter wildlife. You will usually be invisible to wildlife when you remain motionless.

Listening Tips

You are listening to western winter wrens in a forest canopy.



As an interesting alternative to photography, use a field tape recorder to preserve precious memories.

When you listen to natural soundscapes through a pair of headphones, the sounds are amplified and no longer subtle.

Listening Tips

You are listening to an eastern winter wren.

The Sound Tracker

Part of the 1999 Nature of Sound Education Materials Package



National Park Service

For further information contact:

**NPS Ranger Activities Division
Washington, D.C. 202-208-5211**

or

**NPS Intermountain Support Office
Denver, Colorado 303-969-2274**

Produced by Diane Liggett, NPS

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sounds of Hawaii
Volcanoes National Park.*

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