

BRAVURAS OF BIRDS: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF AVIAN EXPRESSION

Course Description:

Birdsong has long inspired humans, from the composers who transcribe its melodies to the activists who used it to communicate on the Underground Railroad. Today, communities from Cornell's Lab of Ornithology to Ecuador's Runa Indigenous people use bird vocalizations to understand their environment. The course joins this rich tradition of using birdsong to inform communication, specifically through writing. Students will encounter approaches to writing about birdsong in genres ranging from poetry to anthropology and ecology, by authors including Maya Angelou, Walt Whitman and Anna Tsing. They will try their hands at different forms of writing, through five principal essay assignments and regular journaling. The course emphasizes core writing skills such as style, source attribution and critical review, as well as ensuring readability for intended audiences.



Three Sample Learning Outcomes:

1. **Interdisciplinary Reading and Writing:** Students will learn to engage with and produce texts across a range of different literary modes and academic disciplines, and to write for a variety of expert and non-expert audiences.
2. **Logical Argumentation and Persuasion:** Students will practice how to develop and argue their own claims, as well as how to support these with effective analysis and relevant evidence.
3. **Evaluation and Assessment of Sources:** Students will hone their ability to weigh the value and effectiveness of sources from the media, academic writing and artificial intelligence, and explore how they influence broader conversations and perspectives.

Three Sample Writing Assignments:

1. **Personal Reflection:** Students will write about a formative connection they have had with the natural world, considering whether / how it has shaped the paths they have followed since.
2. **Comparative Analysis:** Students will compare and contrast (at least) two authors' approaches to using birds as a lens to communicate broader issues facing society and the world around us.
3. **Explorative Research:** Students will describe and analyze an experience involving birds and / or the natural world, exploring its meaning both to them and to other cultures and entities.

Three Sample Texts:

1. Donna Haraway, "Chicken" from *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
2. Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird", *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?*, Random House, 1983.
3. Eduard Kohn, "Form's Effortless Efficacy", *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, University of California Press, 2013.