



Song Of The Birds, by David G. Haskell

For millennia, the language of birds has called us to cross divides. In the Qurâ€™an, Solomon received a bounty and blessing when he was given the language of birds. Job exhorts us to hear the wisdom of the fowls of the air. News of the human world was carried into the divine ear by the speech of Norse Odinâ€™s ravens and the bluebirds of the Taoist Queen of the West. In the voices of birds, we hear augury, portent, prophesy. We are drawn across boundaries into other places, other times.

Listen: an invitation. But it is hard to discern what is meant in this speech of our winged cousins. Birds inhabit flesh profoundly different from our own. Our inattention further muffles their language. We wall them out with bricks that keep us indoors, inside self-made worlds, and with presuppositions, closely guarded vaults of the mind. Weâ€™ve made ourselves a lonely place, so quiet.

Let in the sound. [...]

When we understand the meanings of a sound made by a bird, nerves in two different brains touch and signal. The link between nerve cells is made from vibrating air, a connection as strong and real as the chemical links among nerves in a single brain. Bird sounds, then, are sonic neurotransmitters that leap across species boundaries.

This leap is creative. When bird and human minds connect, a new language is born. This expansive language weaves many species into a communicative whole, a web of listening and speech. Language-learning is indeed for everyone. It unites us. And so we return to the invitation offered to us by the birds around our homes. In their voices we hear the many rhythms of the seasons and the varied physicality of habitats. We learn the individual stories of each bird. We understand how our community is changing and what we should remember from this present moment. We hear and create Earthâ€™s universal grammar.

Letâ€™s answer the birdsâ€™ invitation, stepping outside to give them the simple gift of our attention. Listen. Wonder. Belong.