Animal Voices

Contact *Through* Sound

13.9.26–14.2.27

Museum
Sinclair-Haus
Stiftung Kunst und Natur

Animal Voices.
Contact Through Sound

When living beings hear one another, a relationship arises: be it proximity or distance, invitation or rejection. Sound is not merely the backdrop against which life unfolds. It is one of its fundamental forms.

The exhibition *Animal Voices: Contact Through Sound* explores moments of reaching out and of how artists seek new forms of communication through listening, imitating, and collaborative sound-making. The subtitle does not point to a result, but rather an intention: *Contact Through Sound* is meant as an attempt, not a success. What matters is the act of listening itself.

Those who listen come to realize that other beings experience the world in a completely different way than we do. Amid the accelerating pace of life and ecological destruction, this conscious listening becomes a kind of resistance against our own indifference. Listening makes us aware: we share this planet with countless autonomous creatures.

The exhibition takes you on a journey through this space of resonance. We enter it and, at first, we simply listen: to the **intonation** of a concert that spans the entire planet—and takes place even without us. Then the direction reverses as we try to **reach out to** animals directly through music. We use technology to **translate** other worlds of life—and discover just how unavailable they are, the closer we get. Through **imitation**, we trace the rhythms of non-human music right in our own bodies. And finally, we face that painful moment of **falling silent** when a species goes extinct. In the end, we even leave the audible behind: the seemingly silent octopus shows us, **far beyond sound**, that we simply fail to recognize communication when it doesn‘t match our own sensory world.

Only when we acknowledge this diversity can we design a shared future. Everything begins right here with the first act of seeking contact, experimenting, and the desire to connect.

Jessica Ullrich (exhibition curator),
Martin Ullrich (exhibition curator),
Kathrin Meyer (museum director),
and the entire team at Museum Sinclair-Haus

Podcast Art’n’Vielfalt
Sounding Connection
With Jessica Ullrich
and Martin Ullrich

At The Museum Fence

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PERHAPS WE CAN HEAR GOLDFINCHES

Catherine Clover (born 1963)
2026, banner with transcription
Courtesy of and © Catherine Clover

Can writing chirp or croak? Catherine Clover's site-specific text-based works are responses to the birdlife of each exhibition venue. They start with phonetic transcriptions of avian vocalizations from ornithological field research. When read aloud, the seemingly meaningless syllables—somewhere between language, onomatopoeia, and song—produce a surprisingly bird-like sound. Clover takes up these notations and, with subtle humor, explores the possibilities of translating animal sounds into human (written) language. In this way, moments of listening and approximation emerge. For the current exhibition Clover has developed a kind of script focused on the goldfinch, a migratory bird whose journeys north and south establish a link between Northern Europe, including Bad Homburg, and Algeria as well as other North African countries. From September 14 through October 12, 2026, a large banner will be on public display at the Kurhaus of Bad Homburg, extending the exhibition into the town. A smaller version will welcome visitors at the fence in front of the Museum Sinclair-Haus throughout the exhibition period.

In the Museum Lounge



CALL OF THE WILD
NEOZOON

2017, found footage video, 3:48 min.
Courtesy of the artists; © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

What does it sound like when people want to become cats? For their work entitled *Call of the Wild*, the artist collective NEOZOON compiled online material showing young people imitating animal sounds. Between meows, howls, roars, guttural sounds, and ecstatic heavy-metal performances, a seemingly endless collage of images unfolds, telling of the desire for transformation, the joy of self-staging, and the attempt to vocalize the very nature of other animals. As in all their works, NEOZOON uses only images and videos that already exist online. For ecological reasons the artists refrain from producing their own footage, and they consider the internet's image archives as a mirror of contemporary culture. Their exhibit revolves around the often contradictory relationships between humans and animals and directs attention to the projections, appropriations, and misunderstandings that mark them. *Call of the Wild* reveals how social media become a space for playfully exploring identities and shifting the boundaries between human and nonhuman expression.

Prologue: Intonation

The living world sings, calls, hums, chirps, and crackles. The exhibition opens by placing you in the position of the listener: photographs capture animals at the moment they make a sound, while soundscapes make entire ecosystems audible. The room draws attention to a long-standing network of relationships in which humans are, at first, merely visitors.

Ylla's images catch the fleeting moment when a body becomes an instrument—when a beak opens or a ribcage expands. Acoustically, you can immerse yourself in three soundscapes from different ecosystems at the touch of a button. The space opens your senses to the Earth as a resonator. Leave the familiar background noise behind, listen to the intonations, and attune yourself to a world that is always filled with sound.



ANIMAL LANGUAGE

Ylla (1911–1955)

Photographs from the book Animal Language (London: Country Life Press, 1938)
Image: *Bactrian camel*, 1936 | without image: *Arabian camel*, cheetah, *black & white hornbill* (black-and-white-casqued hornbill, *Bycanistes subcylindricus*), *husky dog*, *lion*, *mandrill*, *hippopotamus*, *African sea eagle*, *sea lion*, *fennec fox*, *zebra*, all 1936
Courtesy of and © Pryor Dodge; Photo: Ylla

A lion's roar, a camel's bellow or grunt, the zebra's barking bray—how can such animal voices be made visible? That was precisely the undertaking of photographer Ylla (Camilla Henriette Koffler), a pioneer of modern wildlife photography. For the book *Animal Language* (1938), she collaborated with zoologist Julian Huxley and animal-sound pioneer Ludwig Koch, taking pictures of animals at the zoos in London and Whipsnade. The "animal languages" that Koch recorded were included on two vinyl records that accompanied the book. As one of the first "sound books," it combined photographs, text, and sound in a way that was novel at the time. Ylla was not interested in static animal portraits but rather in fleeting moments of expression. Her close-ups revealed vocalizations, body language, and facial gestures as a unified whole, portraying animals as sensitive, communicative beings. This work offered a new perspective on their world. The images presented animals as something other than objects of natural history; they came across as individuals with their own expressive power.

Sound Is Language—An Invitation to Listen

Humans can hear only a narrow range of all sounds: between 20 and 20,000 hertz (Hz). Below those frequencies lies infrasound, which is used by some bird species, elephants and whales, for example. Above 20,000 Hz lies the ultrasound of bats. With technical devices we can hear much of what escapes the naked ear, such as the whisper of a mother whale in the ocean, the flow of sap in trees, and the singing of mice. This enhanced ability helps us gain an increasingly precise understanding of these habitats.

Also in daily life, without technical devices, we are far from perceiving everything that reaches our ears. With a little practice, however, we can learn to listen differently—to listen more deeply. How does that work? Listening means becoming attentive, opening oneself to a world of sound. In the 1970s composer Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016) coined the term "deep listening": an open, nonjudgmental kind of listening that encompasses the entire soundscape.

This exhibition invites you to engage in deep listening. It begins with three distinct soundscapes. Every landscape has its own, unmistakable acoustical language. This is the focus of ecoacoustics, or soundscape ecology (see p. 34), and the three pieces presented here follow in that tradition.

MIDNIGHT AT THE OASIS

Chris Watson (born 1953)
2011, from the album *Cross-Pollination*, Touch, London, 4:42 min. (excerpt)

So much for a silent night: calls, chirps, hums, and the flapping of wings shape the soundscape of a midnight oasis. The sounds of animals are far more than mere noises. They serve for orientation, mate-seeking, warnings, or territorial defense. Musician and sound engineer Chris Watson recorded the sounds of the diverse animal community of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. Yet a soundscape is never simply a "technical copy" of reality. It is both a crafted work of art and a document—shaped by the choice of location, the use of specialized technology, and creative editing in the studio. Whose voices can you recognize?

FOREST ENCOUNTERS

Izabela Dłużyk (born 1989)

2017, from the album *Soundscapes of Spring*, LOM, Bratislava, 2:43 min.

Filled with bird calls, the rustling of leaves, and the buzzing of insects: the forest is never silent. Every sound resonates within a polyphonic ecosystem. Izabela Dłużyk documents soundscapes with extraordinary patience and precision. Her recordings bring to life the delicate sonic texture of the forest and the interplay of its many inhabitants. The piece you are about to hear came about in connection with Dłużyk's acoustical recordings in the forests of northeastern Poland, including the Białowieża Primeval Forest, one of last of primeval forests in Europe. With such recordings of the living world, Dłużyk seeks to capture its "beauty, its subtle music, and its gentle voice" by drawing on such sounds from nature.

WEIHER *(Pond)*

Joshua Bonnetta (born 1979)

2026, the recordings were made in 2025 on the grounds of Stiftung Kunst und Natur (Art and Nature Foundation) in Nantesbuch, 6 min.

The recordings by filmmaker and sound artist Joshua Bonnetta transport us into the soundscape of a summer night in Nantesbuch, Upper Bavaria. We hear a chorus of croaking frogs (European tree frog, *Hyla arbor*) as well as the calls of bats (Daubenton's bat, *Myotis daubentonii*; the soprano [or pygmy] pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*; and the common pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). The "landscape" becomes audible as a highly complex, polyphonic texture composed by different living creatures, a densely interwoven coexistence featuring the most varied expressions of life. This act of acoustic translation invites us to experience landscape as a network of relationships among living beings we can encounter by listening.

Reaching Out

In this part of the exhibition, the direction reverses. Humans take the initiative and reach out to other living beings through sound, using specially made instruments, music, and the human voice. These steps to reach out fundamentally shift our understanding of music: in this context, animals are not mere motifs, nor are they sounding backdrops or passive objects. They are addressed as counterparts, as interlocutors, as fellow performers.

Experience how humans make music with parrots, what music composed specifically for animals sounds like, and how so-called farm animals interact with musicians. At the heart of the chapter lies an encounter with creatures of the deep: art dives beneath the waves to contact marine animals, listening to their songs and echoing them on other instruments. Beyond words, listening and making sound together foster a new sort of community, a tentative coexistence that transcends boundaries between species.



DECOY

Leena Saarinen (born 1988)

2022, installation with sound and whistles (wood, plastic, metal, ceramics, paper, reed)
Courtesy of and © Leena Saarinen

When does sound transform into violence? Decoy whistles and imitated animal calls have presumably been used in hunting for millennia. Such simulations have inspired artist Leena Saarinen to create small instruments that mimic animal sounds to attract or deceive other members of the same species. Based on social behavior, these sounds signal readiness to mate, arouse curiosity, trigger territorial behavior, or copy cries for help. For Saarinen, the process of crafting and playing the instruments itself became a form of artistic research through which she learned to simulate the voices of birds. At the center of her work lie mimesis and empathy: mimicry can draw us closer to other living beings, opening up new forms of communication across species. At the same time, the work speaks to the ambivalence of this gift. For while empathy can forge a true connection, it can also be used for control, manipulation, and deception—a tension that Saarinen describes as the „dark side of empathy."



MUSIC FOR ANIMALS, PART XIV, DRAGONFLIES

Marek Brandt (born 1970)

2013, video, music: Simone Weissenfels, Marek Brandt, 6:46 min.
Courtesy of and © Marek Brandt

This is where the music plays—but for whom? Marek Brandt's musical performances are created for animals in the wild, including dust mites, wildcats, monkeys, and the endangered European green toad. Together with musicians, he develops site-specific compositions combining instrumental sounds, electronics, and field recordings, which are performed in the habitats of the various species. Brandt explicitly views "contact through sound" as an open invitation: the animals remain free to approach, listen, join in, or exit the situation. The exhibition features a video of a performance for dragonflies, made in collaboration with pianist and improvisational musician Simone Weissenfels. Sounds of crickets, wind, and rustling grasses recorded on site were also incorporated. As Brandt explains, "the habitat of the animals becomes part of the composition." The performance encourages reflection on shared listening and the interweaving of the human and animal worlds.



Listen to the Album
Songs for Birds

Podcast Art'n'Vielfalt
What Does a Multispecies Household Sound Like?
With Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger from CMUK

SONGS FOR BIRDS
CMUK

2023, installation and LP, Side A: 11:29 min., Side B: 11:51 min.
Courtesy of Hörner/Antlfinger/CMUK; © CMUK; Photo: Oleksii Parkhomenko

What happens when humans and parrots make music with each other? The artist collective CMUK originally consisted of two people and two African gray parrots who lived and worked together. The group's name is composed of the initial letters of Clara, Mathias, Ute, and Karl. The Czech word "cmuk" [ˈt͡s mʊk] is onomatopoeic and roughly translates to "little kiss." Today, the parrots Casper, Clara, and Giselle live with Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger. *Songs for Birds* compiles their improvised songs created at the kitchen table. At some points the humans and birds sing simultaneously; at others, they alternate in response to one another. The experience creates a sense of togetherness that fosters closeness, friction, attentiveness, and mutual listening. This intimate home music blending voices with the strains of a guitar can be taken as a kind of providential communication, with both species expressing themselves through singing.



SHEEP PIG GOAT
Fevered Sleep
2017/26, video, 7:50 min.
Courtesy of Fevered Sleep; © Ben Gilbert

"Can we ever see animals as they really are? Or only ever as we want them to be? And what do animals see, when they see us? " (Fevered Sleep). With *Sheep Pig Goat*, the artist duo Fevered Sleep (David Harradine and Samantha Butler) explores how people perceive "farm animals." Created and filmed in 2017, the project was re-edited in 2026 specifically for this exhibition as a standalone video work. For this project, Fevered Sleep brought sheep, pigs, and goats together with musicians and dancers in improvised encounters. The goal was to foster empathy for the autonomy, individuality, and inner lives of nonhuman animals. They reacted very differently to sounds, movements, and proximity—some with curiosity, others with indifference or reserve. The human participants, in turn, attuned their bodies, instruments, and voices to the signals, emotions, and reactions of the "farm animals" with whom they shared the space. Thus, the project poses the question: can humans and other species ever truly encounter one another? Ethical concerns regarding the instrumentalization of the participating animals led Fevered Sleep to discontinue live performances of the project.



THE NEREIDA CAPSULE

Ariel Guzik (born 1960)

2015, underwater instrument, 190 × 150 × 150 cm | without image: drawings, various dimensions (for details on the drawings, see labels in the exhibition space)
Courtesy of the TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection and the artist (drawings); © Le Fresnoy—Studio national des arts contemporains, Tourcoing, France, 2018, Photo: Eric Le Brun

Nereida is an underwater capsule made of quartz and copper with a stringed instrument at its core. Its subtle sound creates a space for a respectful encounter between humans and cetaceans (whales and dolphins)—free from hierarchies, dominance, or subordination. The instrument exists detached from utility or scientific research. It creates an atemporal space of possibility where song, sound, and gesture can resonate in a ceremonial ritual. Guzik's drawings are vision and practice: meditations on the attempt to make contact with the beings of the sea.

Ariel Guzik writes: „*Nereida's* essence is a material language, a subtle manifesto of echoes for those sea creatures that express themselves and perceive the world through sound. A poem. Statements nested one within the other. The crystalline quality of quartz and its harmonic resonance seek to represent a radiance. Its strings reverberate, forming an echo that comes not from distant cliffs but from within the radiant quartz capsule. Thus, the echo of the strings articulates: space. Space that arises from radiance. And the strings are tuned; their harmonic resonances proclaim: beauty."

1951

Abigail Sanders (born 1987)

2025, from the EP *Sounding Whales* Vol. I, 6:04 min.

French hornist and music researcher Abigail Sanders transcribes the songs of humpback whales to interpret them on her instrument. With this work she poses fundamental questions about the musicality of animal sounds and attempts to answer them through methods of artistic research: are the melodies of humpback whales improvised or composed? Is Sanders' own artistic contribution more that of a performer or rather that of a co-composer? Does an absolutely precise notation of rhythms and microtones lead to the best transcription results? Or is that endeavor better served instead by a graphic notation system—one that more closely resembles the musical notation of the European Middle Ages than that of contemporary music? At the same time, the project fits into a cultural history of humpback-whale song. That narrative ranges from random underwater recordings to pioneering work in bioacoustical research, late 20th-century pop culture, and contemporary discussions on animal rights and environmental protection.

TOWER WHALES

Roger Payne (1935–2023)

1970, from the LP *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, Capitol Records, Hollywood, 3:21 Min.
Private collection

This album radically changed perceptions of whales and animal music. The recordings of complex humpback whale songs became the all-time best-selling album of animal sounds, with millions of copies sold. Until then, humpback whale songs had been known only to researchers. The very first recordings came about by chance—through the U.S. Navy's acoustic surveillance of the oceans during the Cold War. Roger Payne, a biologist and expert in bioacoustics, began researching whale songs in 1967 together with his wife Katy (* 1937), who had studied biology and music. She observed that humpback whales sing fixed verses, repeat them, and develop them further. Spurred by their own fascination and by concern over commercial whaling, they released their recordings as a music album. Listening to whale songs offers insights into the voice cultures of other animals. Payne later said that he had imagined a movement to save the whales could be launched if their songs were somehow integrated into human culture. The recordings did in fact become the emotional soundtrack of the "Save the Whales" movement and played key role in the 1986 global moratorium on whaling.

VALENTINE'S DAY 1992

David Rothenberg (born 1962)

2008, from the album *Whale Music*, Terra Nova, New York, released by Mysterious Mountain Music (BMI), New Jersey, 7:26 min.
Courtesy of David Rothenberg

How can you make music with other animals? To produce *Whale Music*, jazz musician and philosopher David Rothenberg, inspired by Roger and Katy Payne (see p. 14), traveled around the world to improvise with whales. Using underwater speakers and hydrophones, Rothenberg played live with the marine mammals in the ocean. The album documents these interspecies jam sessions.

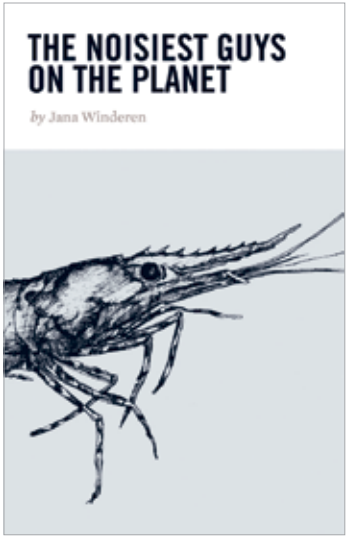
Rothenberg is known for his pioneering work in interspecies music. With his clarinet he improvises directly with animals in their natural habitats. He is famous for his duets with humpback whales, nightingales, and even cicadas. Rothenberg regards such interactions as a musical dialogue bridging between species. His projects, which he also documents in books and documentaries, demonstrate that music is a universal phenomenon that connects species with each other.

WE ARE ONE: ANCESTRAL FLOW

Michaela Harrison

2021, from the project *Whale Whispering*, 16:26 min.
Courtesy of Michaela Harrison

In *Whale Whispering*, singer, sound artist, and healer Michaela Harrison combines song, video, and underwater footage into an artistic exploration of water, memory, and interconnectedness. Since 2018, she has been singing regularly for and with humpback whales on the open sea off the coast of Bahia, Brazil. In collaboration with the Brazilian whale conservation project *Projeto Baleia Jubarte*, she has made recordings that document moments of listening and responding between humans and whales. Harrison views these encounters as an invitation to a mindful exchange and as part of a comprehensive healing process, beginning with the transgenerational trauma of the transatlantic slave trade, voyages of which were also perceived by the ancestors of today's whales. The project's maxim, "We Are One," expresses the profound nexus between humans, animals, and ecosystems. Listening to the poetic space created by the voices of Harrison and the whales becomes, in itself, a form of care.



THE NOISIEST GUYS ON THE PLANET

Jana Winderen (born 1965)

2009, audio cassette (digitized), Ash International—Ash 8.1, Side A: 19:13 min., Side B: 20 min.; cassette cover, drawing: Jana Winderen, design: Philipp Marshall
Courtesy of and © Jana Winderen

Cracking, crackling, crunching—expressions of life from a world usually hidden from human ears. As we listen to them, our perspective on the ecosystems in which they arise also changes. Using highly advanced hydrophone and recording technology, sound artist Jana Winderen has been making the acoustic underwater world audible to humans for many years. She records sounds in oceans, ice-covered regions, and other remote areas, directing attention to soundscapes that are increasingly threatened by human activity. Her album *The Noisiest Guys on the Planet* is dedicated to the *Decapoda* (decapods)—the order of ten-legged creatures that includes crabs, shrimp, and lobsters. As soon as the boat engines fall silent off the Norwegian coast, a dense sonic texture fills the water. Exactly which animals make these sounds and how they are generated remains unclear; they presumably have to do with foraging or feeding. Winderen's work opens our ears to a largely unknown dimension of the sea, to an acoustic landscape in which countless creatures communicate with each other. It invites us to perceive the sea not only as a visible habitat but also as an audible one for other species.

With support from the Institute of Marine Research and the crew of the Johan Hjort. ℗ © MMIX Ash International—*requiescat in sonitus* [May they rest in noise].

Translating ... and Yet Understanding Something Else

First Floor

How do other species experience the world—with their bodies, their perspectives? When a common language is lacking, we seek tools to bridge the gap. This chapter employs artificial intelligence and virtual realities in two ways: as a translation that simulates communication between species and as physical immersion in a perception in which sound also signifies space. Both approaches lead to the same insight: the closer the translation comes, the more unavailable the other world appears.

The two projects presented here engage productively with the limits of our understanding, inviting us to activate our own imagination, daring us to shift perspectives and enter into resonance with other lifeworlds despite all the inevitable misunderstandings. In doing so, they constantly balance technological curiosity, poetic speculation, and the joy of experimentation.



CORPUS CORAX

Ars Electronica Futurelab (Peter Holzkorn, Nicolas Naveau, Anna Weiss)

2025, AI-powered interactive installation (image above: edited with AI)
Courtesy of Ars Electronica Linz; © Photo: Anna Weiss

What would you ask a raven? The art project *Corpus Corax* turns a common raven into a conversation partner. This endeavor brought the artistic research lab Ars Electronica Futurelab together with researchers from the University of Vienna to observe ravens, record their calls, and analyze the meaning those sounds have within the given social context. On this basis Futurelab developed a speculative human-raven translator: an AI tool translates visitors' questions into "raven communication" and responds from the raven's perspective. The interactive installation light-heartedly explores a possible future scenario while also critically examining the attitudes people adopt in this exchange. The title refers to the scientific name of ravens, *Corvus corax,* and plays on the term *corpus*, as in *text corpora* (large, structured collections of written or spoken text stored in machine-readable formats)—the foundation of all generative AI language models. In the sense of the body, they are a premise of all perception. Rather than promising an unambiguous translation, the installation offers a playful space for curiosity, misunderstandings, and the question of how communication between species might be possible someday.

Podcast Art'n'Vielfalt
Can AI enable Raven-Human Communication?
With Peter Holzkorn
and Anna Weiss,
Ars Electronica Futurelab



BATOPIA

Yiou Wang (born 1996)
2024, VR game
Courtesy of and © Yiou Wang

How do bats experience the world? How can technology help us enter into their perception? With the virtual reality game *Batopia*, Yiou Wang invites players to explore a digitally generated environment from a bat's perspective. Rather than relying primarily on sight, players navigate like a bat by using echolocation, a translation of ultrasound into audible and visible signals. Players encounter other bats in flight, hunt insects, and undergo the effects of noise and light pollution on the habitat. Artistic design and scientific research contribute to a speculative shift in perspective. The point is not to simulate biological accuracy but to find how perception, the environment, and coexistence change when active listening serves as a means of orientation and encounter. *Batopia* encourages players to empathize with nonhuman forms of life through technology and play and to question anthropocentric perspectives.

Team of the Trans Species Collective:
Yiou Wang: concept, creative direction, 3D worldbuilding, interaction design, fabrication | Yujie Wang: HCI and sound research | Chuhong Wang: interaction design | Shaoting Zeng: interaction design
Special thanks to: Dr. Mirjam Knörnschild: scientific advisor, field-recording provider | Benjamin Markham: advisor in sound-interaction design

CETI and National Geographic Society's
new campaign *Listen to the Whales*

CAN WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND SPERM WHALE LANGUAGE?
CETI

2026, Video (trailer from the CETI website), 2:16 min.
Courtesy of CETI and the National Geographic Society

Have you ever wondered if it will one day be possible to translate the languages of other animals for humans? The independent research project CETI (Cetacean Translation Initiative) has taken up this challenge and has been working on it since 2020. Since the 1960s specialists in bioacoustics have been studying how whales use complex songs and rhythms to shape culture and social relationships. CETI focuses on sperm whales. The team employs underwater equipment to record the animals' clicks and then analyzes the data with the aid of artificial intelligence. This process draws on marine biology, linguistics, computer science, and bioacoustics to decipher patterns in the sounds and their meanings. Diverging from traditional ways of thinking, this project compels us to question our conception of language and to rethink our understanding of animal communication completely.

Imitating and Visualizing

Following the approach toward the limits of the comprehensible comes a countermovement. Animal sounds are translated into drawing and notation, traced with voice and body, and transformed into music. Not understanding, but resonating—empathy as a form of knowledge, with an open outcome.

The works move playfully between scientific observation and humorous embodiment. By imitating the sounds of animals with our own bodies, we interweave our worlds of sound with theirs. And whoever wishes to mimic and portray must first listen closely.



GROWL

William Wegman (born 1943)

1973–74, single-channel video, digitized,
transferred from Sony AV 3600 12.7 mm videotape, 1 min.
Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William Wegman and Christine Burgin, 2017 (2017.210.92); © William Wegman

Growling, grumbling, rumbling, contorting the mouth, widening the eyes… In the short video *Growl* a human and a dog constitute a minimalist, yet effective, unit: the growling Weimaraner, Man Ray, remains off-screen while William Wegman reacts in front of the camera, his facial expressions shifting in sync. In doing so, he translates the dog's acoustic signals into human mimicry. This experimental setup questions who maintains control in art and how human expression and dog expression might relate to one another.

In the 1970s Wegman created a few short, minimalist videos in which he and Man Ray collaborated closely. The Weimaraner remained his constant companion until 1982. Wegman used video technology, that was still new and readily available at the time, for humorous experiments. It became his way of exploring the possibility of human–canine collaboration in which both sides take part in shaping the action—long before the emergence of interspecies art in the twenty-first century.



PTAČÍ ZPĚV / BIRDSONG

Olga Karlíková (1923–2004)

1971, mixed media, oil on canvas, string, 61.5 × 56.5 cm | without image: *Ptačí zpěv / Birdsong*, undated, marker on paper, 104 × 45 cm; Recording of Birdsong (Thrush), 1976, pencil drawing, 29.5 × 20.5 cm; *Ptačí zpěv / Birdsong*, 1984, pencil drawing, 156 × 45 cm; *Bez názvu / Untitled*, 1993, pencil drawing, 150 × 77 cm
Courtesy of Hunt Kastner Artworks, Prague; © Olga Karlíková Estate and Hunt Kastner; Photo: Michal Czanderle

What shapes might sounds take? At first glance Olga Karlíková's drawings resemble mysterious symbols or an unknown script. Actually, the artist listened intently to the vocalizations of birds, frogs, whales, and other sounds of nature for decades, translating them into lines, dots, and flowing movements on paper. Beginning in the 1960s, she developed for this purpose her own graphic language that is neither musical notation nor scientific record-keeping. She often spent early morning hours drawing on long rolls of paper while listening to the changing voices of birds. Karlíková's aim was not to reproduce animal vocalizations faithfully but rather to translate sound into shape. This resulted in poetic scores that oscillate between drawing, writing, and sound—encouraging us to encounter the acoustic world not just with the ear, but with the eye and perhaps with the entire body.

MUSURGIA UNIVERSALIS
ATHANASIUS KIRCHER (1602–1680)

Musurgia universalis, sive Ars magna Consoni et Dissoni, in X libro digesta (The Universal Musical Art, or the Great Art of Consonance and Dissonance), Vol. 1, Rome: Francisco Corbelletti, 1650, between pp. 30 and 31
No. 1 *Gallicinium* (Rooster), No. 2 *Vox Coturnicis* (Quail's Call), No. 3 *Vox Cuculi* (Cuckoo's Call), No. 4 *Vox parturientis Gallinae* (Voice of the Egg-laying Hen), No. 5 *Gallina conuocans pulles* (A Hen Calling Her Chicks)
Performed by Susanne Kohnen on the Baroque oboe for Museum Sinclair-Haus, 2026

A trill, a repeated note, a surprising turn of melody—can a bird's song be understood as music? The Jesuit and polymath Athanasius Kircher explored this idea in his extensive treatise *Musurgia universalis*, published in Latin in Rome in 1650. Attempts to transcribe avian sound patterns into musical notation had already been made in previous centuries—one example being the anonymous 13th-century canon "Sumer is icumen in" (Summer has come), which incorporates cuckoo calls. However, Kircher's *Musurgia universalis* was the first work to address the subject from the standpoint of music theory.

NIGHT BLACK BIRD SONG
Emily Doolittle (* 1972)

1999, composition, 8:11 min.
Commissioned by the Society of Composers, Inc.
Performed by Stefani Starin and Jayn Rosenfeld (piccolo/flute) and Tom Kolor, Greg Beyer, and Peter Jarvis (percussion)
Released on the CD *Milestones*, 2002, Society of Composers, Inc. CD No. 17

In 1998 Canadian-born composer and musicologist Emily Doolittle wrote her first piece of music that made reference to birdsong. She had just moved to Amsterdam and heard a European blackbird singing, for her an entirely new experience that inspired her to write *night black bird song*. The singing of blackbirds is extremely versatile and varied. Influenced by different dialects, it can sound quite different from one region (and point in time) to the next. Although the nightingale is far more present as a singer in European cultural history than the blackbird is, the aesthetic appeal that blackbird melodies have for many human listeners is at least as great as those of the nightingale. And while nightingales have become rare in many regions of Europe, blackbirds have also thoroughly established themselves in human habitats, including even big noisy cities.

L'ALOULETTE LULU (SKYLARK)

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)

1958, from the 13-part piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux*
In the exhibition: Performed by Anatol Ugorski, 1994
Messiaen: Catalogue d'oiseaux; *La Fauvette des jardins*
Deutsche Grammophon GmbH, Berlin, 8 min.

From chirping and warbling to the concert stages of the world: composer Olivier Messiaen regarded birds as his most important musical mentors. As a fundamental innovator in music, he initially played a key role after 1945 in developing serialism (in which notes and sounds are arranged according to strict mathematical rules and fixed sequences that permit no tone to be repeated until all others have had their turn). In the 1950s, however, he increasingly turned to the free, complex structures of the birdsong he loved so much.

This shift of attention led to the creation of his piano cycle entitled *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (Catalogue of Birds, 1956–1958), a work in which Messiaen combined detailed transcriptions of bird calls with his own avant-garde musical language. These musical soundscapes merge composition and the observation of nature.

What Messiaen, a Catholic, conceived as an acoustical celebration of creation in all its beauty can also be heard today as a testament to a world of sound at risk: many of the birds he listened to have since become rare or endangered.



ÉTUDES POUR LES OISEAUX

Leena Saarinen (born 1988)

2020, installation, sound, seat cushion made from a camouflage blanket, zine
Courtesy of and © Leena Saarinen

What is preserved in translations, what is lost, and what is created anew? In *Etudes for Birds* the artist focuses on mimicry as a form of interspecies communication and on the knowledge that emerges or vanishes in the process. She thereby also explores the relationship between the original and the imitation.

One point of departure is the idea of mimicry as a connecting language between humans and other animals. For this work Saarinen studied the communication of birds as well as spectrograms as visualizations of the avian sounds. She describes the process as follows: “First I’ve imitated the bird vocalizations by drawing, then translated the drawings into sounds as spectrograms and finally collected the drawn sounds into a constructed soundscape. I’ve also played the drawn sounds for the birds in the Central Park of Helsinki.” You can listen to these sounds here in the exhibition space—feel free to lie down on the cushion designed by the artist.

Through these many steps of mimicry and translation, the artist seeks to approach the perspective of the other—with the goal of fostering empathy for other beings.



A GUIDE TO THE BRITISH NON-PASSERINES

Marcus Coates (born 1968)
2002, digital video, 32:56 min.
Produced by Wysing Arts, United Kingdom
Courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, London; © Marcus Coates

To what extent can use our imagination to blur the boundaries between species? In *A Guide to the British Non-Passerines*, Marcus Coates imitates the calls of 86 British bird species that are not taxonomically classified as songbirds (*Passerines*). The starting point consisted of audio recordings of bird vocalizations that were technologically slowed down to make their structure and details more perceptible to humans. The video is based on these decelerated sounds, which Coates rehearsed and subsequently recorded before the camera. He then sped up the video of his singing, giving the impression that his voice matches directly with the calls of the particular bird species. The accelerated movements of his head and face simultaneously lend him a bird-like quality and create a comical effect. Part scientific bird guide, part performance, and part projection of Coates's own persona, the work explores the possibilities of physical mimicry and the extent to which humans can approximate nonhuman forms of expression.

Falling Silent

When animal species disappear, their voices fall silent — and with them, relationships and ways of perceiving the world are lost. Landscapes that once vibrated with thousands of calls grow quiet. This section addresses the painful demise caused by global extinction of species. The hush touches on fundamental ecological and ethical questions of our time. With every voice that is no longer heard, we are deprived of far more than just a biological species: a unique way of perceiving the world and engaging with it has vanished as well.

Where vitality fades, art becomes an archive. The works capture the sonic traces of dying species and create a space for collective mourning. They keep alive the memory of those voices we have already lost—and call for action so that the great silence does not become our new reality.



LAST CALLS – PINK NOISE

Alice Q. Hargrave (born 1962)

Series since 2017, collages of photographs and spectrograms,
image: *Mangroves, Roseate Spoonbill and Killdeer Calls*, 2026 | without image:
Snowy Owl, Calls, 2018; *The Suffragette Conference of the Birds, after Farid Attar, female bird vocalizations*, 2021; Water *Music, Lake Calls*, 8 Species, 2025; *Pastorales, Prairie Calls*, 10 Species, 2025; *Forest in the Sea, Flamingo Calls*, 2026; *Nocturnes, Midnight Calls, Nightingale*, 2026; *Tracing Audubon*, 2021, audio montage, 33 min.
Courtesy of and © Alice Q. Hargrave

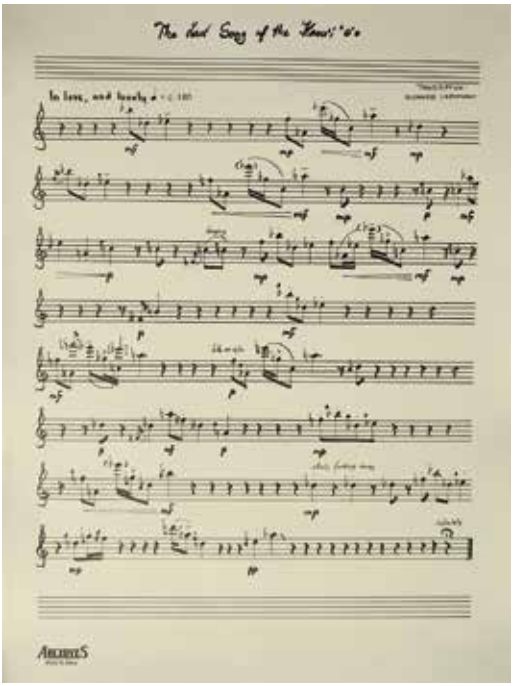
What would a world without the voices of birds sound like? Hargrave uses spectrograms of their songsgraphical representations of sounds—which she prints on large fabric panels. Beginning in the 1960s, spectrograms revolutionized bioacoustics because they depict nuances and frequencies that escape the human ear. The colors are inspired by the appearance of the birds or their habitats. On display here is a series of textiles suspended freely in the space showing visual soundscapes from various ecosystems—from mangroves and prairies to lakes and coastlines—as well as *The Suffragette Conference of the Birds*, which is dedicated to the often overlooked songs of female birds. Her sound installation Tracing Audubon is also dedicated to the preservation of bird calls. Hargrave superimposes historical and contemporary archival recordings of the 22 species that naturalist and illustrator John James Audubon (1785–1851) observed and drew for his *Birds of the Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas* (1832). She deliberately incorporates the voices of the sound recordists, who provide details about the birds and catalog numbers. She thereby reveals that we are listening to a soundscape conveyed by the archive.



BIRDSONG
Michelle Cheng (born 2001)
2022, video, 3 min.
Courtesy of and © Michelle Cheng

What remains when a species falls silent forever? This animated film explores the story of the extinct Hawaiian bird Kaua'i 'Ō'ō (scaly-throated moho, *Moho braccatus*). Drawing on historical audio recordings of its song, as well as the notes, photographs, and field reports of biologist John Sincock from the 1960s and 1970s, Michelle Cheng explores memory, loss, and the disappearance of a species. In 1984 biologist James Jacobi joined Sincock in recording the song of what is believed to have been the very last bird of its kind. In the film Cheng revisits this encounter and imagines it visually. The Kaua'i 'Ō'ō responds to the recording of its own song and tries in vain to reach out to a fellow bird.

The Kaua'i 'Ō'ō was once native to the mountain forests of the island of Kaua'i. Dwindling habitat, invasive species, and mosquito-borne diseases led to its extinction. The bird's voice remains as an echo of a world irretrievably lost—and as a poignant testament to species extinction.



THE SONG OF THE KAUAʻI ʻŌʻŌ

Alexander Liebermann (born 1989)
2021, handwritten score (reproduction)
© Alexander Liebermann

How can we preserve the songs of nonhuman beings from oblivion? Composer Alexander Liebermann answers this question by precisely transcribing the song of the Hawaiian Kauaʻi ʻŌʻō into musical notation, making it playable. Thus it was that an instrumental score was born of this extinct bird's exquisite songs.

Whether it be howling wolves, whistling frogs, or bellowing stags, Liebermann transcribes a wide variety of animal sounds into musical notation and successfully shares this work on social media. That work continues a historical tradition that stretches from the Middle Ages to Athanasius Kircher and Olivier Messiaen. His videos combine bioacoustics, composition, and digital outreach. They demonstrate that animal vocalizations possess complex rhythmic and melodic structures. The success of his videos speaks of the need to experience the living world through music and to perceive animal sounds as forms of expression in their own right.

Beyond Sound

What escapes us when we focus exclusively on sound? The final room of the exhibition leads to living beings whose world is scarcely revealed through sound. The tour ends with an opening: sound was our access—yet it is not the only one, and the question of the other remains greater than the ear.

The epilogue leaves the realm of the audible by exploring works by Tuomas A. Laitinen dedicated to octopuses. These beings communicate in highly complex ways, expressing themselves through colors, patterns, chemical signals, and movement. Our focus on what is audible proves to be a human filter. Often, we discern something as meaningful only if it is akin to our own senses.

That prospect raises questions: How can we go beyond sound? How can we come to understand as meaningful even those languages that function in ways entirely different from human ones? How can we expand the limits of our perception and imagination?



HAEMOCYANIN

Tuomas A. Laitinen (born 1976)

2019, , ultra HD video, 8:03 min.

Without image: *A Proposal for an Octopus*, 2019, series of hand-blown glass objects

Courtesy of the artist and Helsinki Contemporary, © Tuomas A. Laitinen

How can we begin to engage with animals that communicate without sound? Laitinen's works invite us to take other forms of communication seriously and to reflect on the boundaries—including those dictated by biology—that limit our understanding.

In the video *Haemocyanin*, an octopus explores a glass object that artist Tuomas A. Laitinen created for them. The groping by the tentacles appears to constitute a sign language all its own. From these fluid motions, Laitinen developed the artistic script called *Ctongue*, a sign system that draws on the octopus's movements but remains indecipherable to humans. Laitinen's video has created a multilayered encounter featuring close-ups, reflections, polished glass lenses, and digitally generated images. The title refers to the copper-bearing molecule hemocyanin, which regulates oxygen transport in octopuses and lends their blood its characteristic blue color.

***600 Hz (of protean behavior)*, 2022, audio, 8:32 min.**

The sound piece *600 Hz (of protean behavior)* is based on a frequency that octopuses can perceive well. Their hearing range lies between 400 Hz and 1,000 Hz, whereas that of humans ranges from 20Hz to 20,000 Hz. Octopuses perceive sound waves and vibrations in water via a specialized organ (the statocyst, which is actually responsible for the sense of balance).

The Ecology of Sound

In ecosystems, sound is communication. The exhibition invites you to immerse yourself in the aesthetic diversity and abundant nuances of animal voices. But how is this acoustic world changing as humans become increasingly loud?

Soundscape Ecology distinguishes three sources of sound in our environment[1]:

- **Biophony** (sounds of living organisms)
- **Geophony** (natural sounds such as those made by wind and water)
- **Anthrophony** (noise produced by humans)

When anthrophony drowns out biophony, there are serious consequences for wildlife.[2]

[1] See Bryan C. Pijanowski et al., "Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape," *BioScience*, 61/3, March 2011, pp. 203–216. doi.org/10.1525/bio.2011.61.3.6 (accessed July 26, 2026)
[2] See *Was Vögel unter Wasser hören. Unterwasserlärm gefährdet Tauchvögel* (What Birds Hear Underwater: Underwater Noise Threatens Diving Birds), 2022, schleswig-holstein.nabu.de (accessed July 26, 2026).

Three Facts About Noise Pollution

1. Acoustic Masking and Chronic Stress
Human-made noise (e.g., from traffic, both on land and in water) masks the frequencies in which animals communicate. Animals do not adapt to this constant noise: Studies by the Max Planck Institute for Biological Intelligence show that chronic road noise leads to persistently elevated stress hormone levels, delayed chick growth, and reduced survival rates in birds.

2. High Energy Costs Due to Adaptation
Many songbirds attempt to drown out ambient noise by singing at a higher frequency or at maximum volume (the so-called Lombard effect). This constant extra effort consumes valuable energy and limits their range when selecting mates and defending territories.

3. Loss of Habitats
Noise acts like an invisible wall. Even if a park or wooded area appears intact at first sight, many species will avoid the area as soon as the noise level exceeds a critical threshold. And underwater noise, such as that from ships, has devastating consequences for marine animals because they rely on sound for both communication and navigation.

Quiet, Please!—Three Suggestions for Everyday Life

1. Manual Instead of Motorized Devises in Your Own Yard
Avoiding loud, motorized gardening tools, such as leaf blowers, robotic mowers, or string trimmers (weed whackers) prevents extreme spikes in noise levels. Using hand tools protects microhabitats and ensures peace and quiet in your immediate living environment.

2. Planting as an Acoustic Buffer Zone
Structurally diverse planting that features dense, native shrubs and hedges serves as a natural sound absorber. Such landscaping dampens ambient noise and creates refuges for insects, birds, and small mammals.

3. Silence as a Protected Resource in the Community
Noise protection is nature conservation. Municipal action-planning for noise abatement (in accordance with the EU Environmental Noise Directive) can enable citizens to take active part in pressing for quiet zones in city parks, speed limits of 30-km/h (about 20 mph) along green corridors, and areas of reduced traffic volume.

Sources and Further Information
Max Planck Society (2019): *Vögel gewöhnen sich nicht an Verkehrslärm* (Birds Do Not Get Used to Traffic Noise): a study on the physiological effects of stress.
BUND & Umweltbundesamt German Association for Environment and Nature Conservation, BUND; and The German Environment Agency, UBA): *Leitfaden zur Lärmaktionsplanung und zum Schutz ruhiger Gebiete* (Guidelines on Noise Action Planning and the Protection of Quiet Areas).
NABU: *Working Group on Ecoacoustics & Protection of Acoustic Habitats*
Pijanowski et al. (2011): *Soundscape Ecology: The Science of Sound in the Landscape* (BioScience)

Sound Archives

Many research institutions archive recordings of animal sounds, making it possible to document species, track changes, and remember extinct soundscapes. Notable animal sound archives include:

- **Macaulay Library (Cornell Lab of Ornithology):** macaulaylibrary.org

One of the world's largest collections of sound recordings of wild animals. The archive currently contains more than 3.2 million sound recordings of more than 11,000 animal species, such as birds, mammals, amphibians, insects, and fish.

- **Xeno-canto:** xeno-canto.org/

An online database where people from all over the world freely share their recordings.

Animal Voices
Contact through Sound

September 13, 2026 – February 14, 2027

An exhibition curated by Jessica Ullrich and Martin Ullrich

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Graphic design: Ines Blume, gardeners, Frankfurt am Main | Printing: oeding print GmbH, Braunschweig | Paper: enviropolar, 100% recycled paper, Blue Angel certified; Cover: Gmund Colors Matt, FSC certified. Climate–neutral printing with 100% green electricity and vegan toners.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the exhibition, especially the artists and lenders.

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Museum Sinclair-Haus
Löwengasse 15, 61348 Bad Homburg v. d. H.
Eine Institution der Stiftung Kunst und Natur gGmbH

Stand: 09 / 2026

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ISBN: 978-3-945674-16-1
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