



## RECORDING SOUND WORLDS: DOCUMENTING NATURAL LIFE AND PLACING BIO-ACOUSTICS

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### Research project context

For many among us, the sounds of nature are one of the joys of living; but they can all too easily go unheard. In varied combination, wildlife, weather, wind and waves are environmental phenomena treasured for the ways they texture, inform and give rhythm to individual experience and social life. The recording and mediation of sound from the non-human world has become an acknowledged field of amateur expertise, of scientific knowledge and of artistic experiment.

This project will examine formations of sound accruing to the natural world: of bio-acoustic field recording; of fieldwork and production techniques; of styles of composition and presentation; each pioneered by early naturalists/sound recordists and now practiced by contemporary naturalists, phonographers and artists (Montgomery 2009). Conceptually, the project is intended to deepen and extend interlocking geographical debates around 'animal geographies' (Philo and Wilbert 2000), 'hybrid geographies' (Whatmore 2002; Braun 2008) and 'more-than-representational' geographies (Lorimer 2006; 2010). Framed by existing geographical inquiries into sonic environments and cultures of listening particular to places, times and technologies (Leyshon *et al* 1998; Revill 2000; Matless 2005; Anderson *et al* 2005; Lorimer 2007), social theories of the voice and listening (Nancy 2005) and inter-disciplinary research on auditory cultures and the cultural origins of sound reproduction (Bull and Back 2004; Stern 2006) the project will focus attention on the diverse cultural values, social practices, craft skills and technical "know-how" that are deemed necessary for the satisfactory documentation of the natural world of sound. It seeks to understand field recordings as composite entities, or, as assemblages of humans, animals, habitats and technologies, which are variously received, and ascribed differing kinds of meaning.

### Research Aims

1. to transport conceptual ideas from cultural geography and science-and-technology-studies (STS) into fieldwork settings so as better to understand the spatialities and knowledge-practices of natural history and environmental field recording
2. to develop a supple approach to research practice which brings into close correspondence work in experimental geography (Paglen *et al* 2008), new forms of social research (Lorimer 2005), and sonic arts methodologies (Augoyard and Torque 2005)
3. to investigate how expertise in *listening* to, and recording, the natural world has come to be judged, fostered and shared
4. to examine the ways in which bio-acoustic field recordings are classified, and heard: (as biologically representative; according to geographical arrangements of regional and national natures; as a faithful rendering of natural sounds; as an augmented version of natural reality; as therapeutic and healing sounds; as works of experimental sound-art, meriting critical or musicological review.
5. to consider the sites, scales and styles which are used to give bio-acoustic field recordings narrative shape (e.g. collage "soundscapes", sonic-journeys such as migration, place/habitat portraiture)

6. to examine the ways in which compositional field recordings are deployed as a preferred narrative device in public radio broadcasting, and other associated media,
7. to examine the use of bio-acoustics as evidence in scientific debates over global environmental change, species movement and habitat loss

### Research Methods

The project methodology will draw together source materials, sound recordings and qualitative interview data from complementary research activities, variously accessing.

*Archival sources:* the sound collections, archival records, and journals of: the BBC Natural History Recording Unit; the British Library of Wildlife Sounds, a Department of the British Institute of Recorded Sound; the Wildlife Sound Recording Society; the British Trust of Ornithologists.

*Recognised experts:* the publications and memoirs of sound recording pioneers (e.g. Ludwig Koch, Eric Simms) will be critically considered. In-depth interviews will be arranged with recognised experts in natural sound recording (e.g. Chris Watson, Geoff Sample)

*Field knowledge:* lessons in research design will be drawn from disciplines (anthropology; zoology, biology) interdisciplinary subject areas (sonic arts) and professions (sound recording, mammal/bird ecology) with a long-standing or emerging expertise in sound-based and documentary field recording techniques. The project is based on a commitment to learn-by-doing (Sennett 2008) and so will take seriously the prospect of learning craft skills and associated technologies necessary to develop an ear for sound. The researcher will attend field recording workshops, and shadow naturalists and conservationists during field recording operations.

### Project supervision and synergies

Research project supervision will be led by Dr Hayden Lorimer

<<http://www.ges.gla.ac.uk:443/staff/hlorimer>> and be framed by Departmental interests in 'Creative Geographies', one of the research themes of the Human Geography Research Group <<http://www.ges.gla.ac.uk:443/research/groups/humangeography>>

### References

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### **Application procedure and deadlines**

To be considered for PhD studentships to be held in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES), suitably qualified candidates should apply via the website of the College of Science and Engineering

(<http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/scienceengineering/graduateschool/prospectivestudents/essentialinformation/>). Closing dates for University and research council funded studentships will be in early in the new year, as stated on the GES studentships page: (<http://web2.ges.gla.ac.uk/~mlee/GES%202010%20studentships>).

Non- English speakers must meet the University's English language requirements. Candidates for ESRC studentships should also meet the ESRC's requirements for both academic qualifications and residential eligibility. For more information go to <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index.aspx> and please note that *non-UK European Union citizens will be awarded fees only by ESRC.*

For informal enquiries about the research projects please contact the relevant supervisors. Information on the GES graduate school and the application process can be obtained from Mrs Jean McPartland, the assistant to head of the School ([Jean.McPartland@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Jean.McPartland@glasgow.ac.uk)), or Professor Susan Waldron ([Susan.Waldron@Glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Susan.Waldron@Glasgow.ac.uk)), the head of the GES graduate school.