



## Listening to a Continent Sing: Birdsong by Bicycle from the Atlantic to the Pacific

**Donald Kroodsma**

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*With birdsong and father-son bonding, this book is an immersive experience, following the author on his journey and learning along with him.*

Donald Kroodsma has already written multiple books about birds and their songs, but his latest book, *Listening to a Continent Sing*, combines that interest with a narrative of a 2003 bike trip across the country with his adult son. The author's knowledge of his subject comes through, and the result is a pleasant travelogue with interesting insights into nature.

The story begins in Virginia, as the duo travels west to the Oregon coast, passing through such historical locations as Yorktown, the Grand Tetons, Yellowstone, and parts of the Oregon Trail. At each stop, Kroodsma describes the singing of the different birds he hears, making the book work as a partial guide to the birds of the United States while still reading as a first-person travel narrative.

The father-son bonding is described well, with little bits of dialogue that show how their relationship grows closer through spending so much time together and sharing the trip. Kroodsma also includes snippets of scenes where the pair meet locals or other travelers along the way. Those scenes could stand to be fleshed out a bit more—the encounters are usually reduced to just a few lines of dialogue, and some characters seem interesting enough for more detail—but the birdsongs remain the focus. The entire story is written in the first person and present tense, making it feel almost like a diary, with the entries divided by locations along the way. That has some limitations, as everything in the story is taking place in the moment, but Kroodsma's writing ability ensures it doesn't become boring or repetitive.

Birdsong is obviously a major part of the story, so the author has supplemented the description in the book with a companion website housing audio clips of all of the birds mentioned in the book. References to those clips, combined with small illustrations of the birds in question, appear throughout *Listening to a Continent Sing* and provide valuable context. Those additions make the book an immersive experience, following the author on his journey and learning along with him.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Summer 2016)

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