

Spring's sounds more than pretty

NATURE TRAILS



TIMOTHY NOWICKI

Spring sounds surround us as frogs and birds prepare for the rites of the season. Each species has its own unique sound that identifies it from others and thus attracts only the same species.

In birds, sounds also help individuals to partition their habitat so each pair will have adequate resources with which to raise their young.

Most of the sounds we hear are made as a vocalization. In the throat of many animals is a "voice box" that is the sound production structure. Birds have a syrinx, while mammals have a larynx.

But important sounds produced by many animals do not come from the throat. Insect sounds are made by mechanical means. Legs are rubbed together like a fingernail over the teeth of a comb. Or a tympanum is vibrated to produce a loud buzzing in a cicada.

Birds also produce mechanical sounds. Drumming of woodpeckers is done on a hollow tree to create a resonant tap that serves the same function as a sound produced in the throat. Finding a suitably downy sound can create an amplified sound no tree could make.

The very feature that makes a bird a bird — feathers — can also make mechanical sounds. Ruffed

grouse use a suitable log lying on the ground for their courtship drumming. A male beats his wings toward his body and compresses the air between. He does not hit his body. Rapidly "inching" wingbeats produce a low thumping sound that travels through the forest to attract a mate.

In open marsh areas, the sky dance of the common snipe produces an eerie sound. High overhead the male snipe flies in a deep undulating pattern. On the down slope of the pattern, he spreads his tail feathers. Wind passing between the open feathers creates a low pitched vibration often described as a whinnowing.

Some courtship activities include both vocal and mechanical aspects. American woodcock have a peent-like call they produce while on the ground. They include sounds produced by their narrow wing feathers when flying. While in the sky, circling over the area where they were calling on the ground, wind passing through the very narrow outer wing feathers produces a rattling sound audible on a quiet spring night.

Sound, no matter how it is produced, and the sense of hearing, helps broaden the range of communication — especially if the animal is in darkness or dense vegetation.

Tim Nowicki is a naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park in Oakland County. He lives in Livonia.

Dolan's bill would create patient advocate sticker

Michiganians will be able to designate a patient advocate on their drivers licenses next year under a bill approved by the House of Representatives.

"It would take just a sticker. And there's no need to have it with-

nessed," said Rep. Dan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, the sponsor.

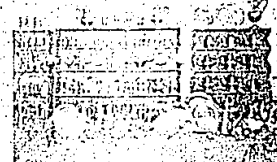
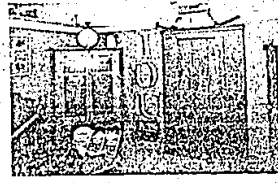
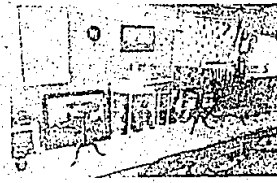
"It's one of those things that had to be done. Organ donors were very supportive. So was the Michigan Hospital Association," she said.



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