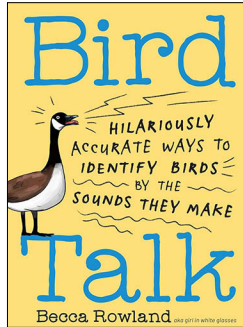


## ORNITHOLOGY

**Bird Talk: Hilariously Accurate Ways to Identify Birds by the Sounds They Make**

By Becca Rowland. 2025. Storey. 256 pages, 22.99 CAD, Paper, 15.99 CAD, E-book.

Author and Nova Scotian Becca Rowland, or 'girl in white glasses' as she is known on social media, gives us in *Bird Talk* a print version of her much-loved bird videos. If you are not familiar with them, Rowland's signature short, illustrated videos help birders with identification by relating the sounds that



birds make to everyday sounds or pop culture references, such as *Star Trek* transporters (Veery), someone learning how to play the recorder (Northern Saw-whet Owl), or the theme song from *The Price is Right* (Grasshopper Sparrow). The videos feature audio of the bird call and sometimes the related sound in question, with voiceover and art by Rowland.

In the introduction of *Bird Talk*, Rowland acknowledges that birds make different sounds for different purposes, at different times of day, and at different locations. The purpose of the book is not to cover every vocalization a bird can make, but rather to provide intuitive, easy-to-remember connections between bird sounds and sounds or music readers are likely to already know. Covering birds from North America and elsewhere, *Bird Talk* is divided into 10 sections based on different bird characteristics, such as It Doesn't Mean What You Think: Birds with Suggestive Names (Chapter 2), Do You Have a Towel? Birds That Love the Water (Chapter 4), and Who? I Think You Mean Whom: Let's Talk About Owls (Chapter 5).

Rowland's illustrations are charming, and the writ-

ing is informal and genuinely funny. Although the book is missing the cartoons, bird jokes, and illustrated shorts available on Rowland's social media accounts, *Bird Talk* has additional content to make up for it. Each of the 101 species profiles includes interesting tidbits, and every chapter ends with a short (ranging from two to four pages) bonus topic; these topics include why we owe pigeons an apology, the differences between crows and ravens, and nest types.

As someone who has to relearn birdsong every spring, I appreciate a good mnemonic device. So, the big question is: How effective is this content in print? To assess this, I referenced Merlin Bird ID (for birds I didn't know), and I also compared the book's entries to Rowland's videos for the same species. Rowland does a good job of translating both the video content and her characteristic humour to print. For me, the video format, which combines the bird sound with the mnemonic, was more effective than text alone, but both are leagues better than what is included in a typical bird identification guide. This is not a book I would reach for if I were in the field trying to identify a bird call, but it is an accessible and delightful resource that can serve as a primer or reminder. For those who, like me, are on a lifelong journey to finally make this information stick, *Bird Talk* is perhaps best read with a library of bird calls nearby. This book would also be a friendly introduction for anyone new to birding by ear and make a great gift for the bird lover in your life. If someone could make *Frog Talk* next, I would be much obliged.

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