

ABOUT THE COVER

**Text by
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McCallum**

Once it's framed and on my wall, this *Birding* cover will constantly remind me of what birds and birdsong have meant to me for six and a half decades. Two pivotal species for me were the **Carolina Wren** (bottom center) and the **Long-billed Curlew** (bottom right). The wren, state bird of my native South Carolina, was the first bird I learned to identify by ear. I guess I was 10 or 11 when my parents started letting me take unsupervised jaunts into the woods on our family farm, and I can still remember the ringing *video, video, video* of the wren I stalked and saw making it.

The curlew was the “grail bird” of my entire youth. It had formerly wintered in my state, and the skyline of Charleston is readily identified in the background of Audubon's portrait of this largest sandpiper in the western hemisphere. Every trip to the coast was a covert search for the curlew. I would never see it there, though; perhaps the demise of the prairies in the eastern part of the Great Plains wiped out the population that wintered on the Atlantic coast. I saw and heard my first Long-billed Curlews when I moved to Colorado in my twenties. My first recordings were of those magical birds of the prairie, made with a cardboard parabola, a cheap microphone, and a cassette recorder. The curlew recordings in my feature article in this issue of *Birding* (pp. 50–63) were obtained in my current home state of Oregon,



Long-billed Curlew. Chippewa County, Michigan; May 2006.
Photo by © Alan Murphy.



near the world-famous birding destination of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

I got my first decent microphone in 1981. It was a Sennheiser ME88 that I still use, and it changed my birding life. Hundreds of tapes and thousands of hours later, I exult in the chase when I'm out in the field trying to record a new species or new sound, or just a beautiful, unobstructed sample of something familiar. I exult again in the studio, when I get to look at the sound on the computer, both reliving the field experience and diving deeply into the sound itself, an artifact that, like a photograph, now has a life of its own. My article in this issue is an invitation to join in either or both forms of joy.

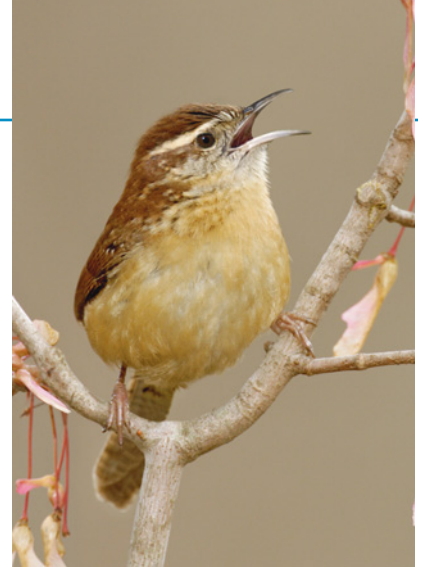
The birds across the top of the cover—from left to right, **Eastern Wood-Pewee**, **Lazuli Bunting**, and **Cooper's Hawk**—embody the three different grades of singing that I will discuss in a companion piece later this year in *Birding*. The hawk, like many non-passerines (woodpeckers, cuckoos, trogons, raptors, and so forth), has little variety in its repertoire of songs; its vocalizations are very repetitious. Most of our songbirds, exemplified by the Lazuli Bunting and the Carolina Wren, have multiple song types (wren) and/or regional or local dialects (bunting). These species have so much variety because they learn their songs, much as humans learn language.

Flycatchers, including the wood-pewee, don't learn their songs at all, but their innate repertoires

and patterns of singing are in some ways more intricate than those of the song learners. Unlike the song learners (called oscines), they sing exactly the same songs throughout their ranges; if they don't, we need to look for genetic differentiation and the possibility that two species, or subspecies, are involved.

I look forward to sharing my excitement about these patterns with you.

Eastern Wood-Pewee. Scioto County, Ohio; May 2004. Photo by © Robert Roysse.



Carolina Wren. Harris County, Texas; December 2008. Photo by © Alan Murphy.



Lazuli Bunting. Lane County, Oregon; June 2008. Photo by © Joe Fuhrman.



Cooper's Hawk. Cape May, New Jersey; October 2007.
Photo by © Jim Zipp.