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The human experience of places and their atmospheres is often bound up with the co-presence of other-than-human beings. In examining these experiences, this chapter draws on narratives received through the *Listening to Birds* project, which explores how people perceive and respond to bird sounds. Many narratives describe how people resonate with birds through sound, that is, how they attend to birds by listening as they go about their own activities. This resonance is integral to emplacement and a ‘sense of being’ and generates feelings of belonging, contentment and home. Listening to birds, it is argued, becomes focal to a whole bodily experience of the landscape. But when circumstances change so often do the bird sounds and here I explore responses to these changes, comparing the stories of people who have moved between the UK and Australia and New

Zealand, nations with contrasting avifauna. These describe the sometimes alienating, sometimes thrilling initial experience of birds sounding ‘wrong’ or different and how people then learn to relate to the different sounds and atmospheres of a new home. I also explore the ways in which the sounds of the old homeland are remembered and what feelings this remembering stirs. These narratives are intensely personal but they describe aesthetic experiences of place and nation, defining and scrutinising how home *should* sound. Narrative representations, it is argued, are integral to experiencing place, an interaction that forges a sense of companionship with other species and with the landscape.

5
Senses of being

The atmospheres of listening to birds in Britain, Australia and New Zealand

Andrew Whitehouse

Sense of place, sense of being

When the Listening to Birds project was launched in November 2007 I received several hundred emails from people describing their experiences of bird sounds.[1] One came from Lou Horton from Devon, who wrote:

> Birdsong becomes so much a part of the aural environment it becomes nearly invisible – until it changes. I came to the UK as a teenager having grown up in Australia. Two things struck me straight away: both the stars and the birds were wrong. More than anything else, these two things made me feel alien.
>
> Nearly 30 years later I came across Australian birdsong on the internet. A short burst of currawong song brought back an intense feeling of being a child again in Sydney. I could almost smell the air and feel the texture of my primary school uniform. It's like a trigger to a sense of being, rather than a memory of doing.

Lou's account reveals that, although birdsong is a feature of experience that many people rarely notice, it can still be very significant, something that a change in circumstances can suddenly reveal. Listening to birds can be subtly integral to the atmosphere of a place and to a sense of belonging, but can also be profoundly strange and alienating. It can also be a way to feel connections with other places and other times, as well as with the here and now. My aim here is to explore how my respondents understood their encounters with birds through sound, the atmospheres these were part of and the ways that these changes are involved in both their sense of place and, as Lou puts it, their sense of being. I develop further on these themes by considering how senses of place and of being relate to the more-than-human atmospheres that are experienced through listening to birds. To do this I consider the relations between senses of place, of being and of atmosphere. I examine how these experiences are narrated and how people's sense of being is related to shifts in the more-than-human atmospheres of listening to birds.

When the Listening to Birds project was launched, it was featured prominently in the media, most usefully on the BBC News website, which provided a link to the project website. This included a page through which people were invited to describe their experiences of bird sounds. Respondents were, perhaps inevitably, English speaking. Most responses came from the UK but many were from and about Australia and New Zealand. I do not wish to suggest that listening to birds is as important to British people in general as it is to my respondents. Instead, I argue that the narratives I discuss are highly typical; they are an exemplification of how experiences of listening to birds can be narrated and the role this plays in sensing place and in the atmospheres that many people encounter in their everyday lives.

The responses varied greatly in length and subject matter, some being just short comments and others being detailed reminiscences or descriptions of how bird sounds are recognised. Although almost all described bird sounds very positively, few claimed to be birders; these were not people who go out with the specific intention of encountering birds. Instead, most encountered birds primarily whilst doing something unrelated, such as lying in bed, sitting in their garden, or travelling to work. In most cases people wrote about listening to birds that live alongside respondents and that were, at least at some point in their lives, everyday encounters. Blackbirds, for example, are significant to many in Britain in part because they live around people, in gardens, parks and woods. Their lives are entangled with many and this presence is revealed most readily and most eloquently through their singing and vocalising.

I understand the encounters I describe as respondents' narrations of being alongside nonhumans in a shared world (Whitehouse 2017). In this sense, what they write is their way of understanding their experience at that specific point but that draws upon the narrator's accumulated life experience (Rapport and Overing 2000: 285). My interest is in how these narratives of experience are distinctly personal in reflecting the sometimes powerful yet everyday experience of listening to birds, but I will also touch on how these experiences are influenced by larger historical processes, narratives and ideas. In particular, I examine how bird sounds provide a focal point that is ecologically bound with various other elements in people's experience of atmosphere. I also discuss how certain aesthetic and moral sensibilities are brought to bear on these experiences and influence the way that atmospheres are reflected upon and felt.

I explore these themes in three stages. First, I consider the homely atmospheres that emerge through the sounds of familiar species. I also address the question of how bird sounds come to be noticed in the first place and how everyday experiences of listening to birds become aesthetic. I argue that aesthetic understandings of bird sounds need to reflect the whole bodily experience of listening rather than just treating the sound as an isolable aesthetic object. The aesthetics of the more-than-human atmospheres that emerge through listening to birds thus focus on how diverse elements are gathered together in being sensed, felt and narrated. Second, I discuss the ways in which changing circumstances can reveal how experiences are idealised and related to larger narratives of nature and nation. Changes, for example in the birds that people can hear, reveal an experiential aesthetics of place in which the atmospheres that are felt can seem homely or unsettling. Third, I look at examples of listening to birds in New Zealand where the more-than-human atmospheres elicited draw together places and senses of being but also evoke more unsettling biographical or national experiences in which atmospheres can be felt as 'out of place'.

Before discussing these themes, I will explain my approach to senses of place and of being and how I see these as relating to the more-than-human atmospheres of listening to birds.[2]

Sounds, charisma, place and atmospheres

Places are sensed. Here, my focus is on how places are sensed through listening to birds but I first emphasise that listening is a multi-sensory experience that has sound as a focal point that gathers together a range of other elements. It is this gathering that respondents describe in their narratives. It is also this gathering of elements that can be defined as an atmosphere. Atmospheres are thus diverse mixtures that are inherently more-than-human (Ingold 2015: 72).

Places are also ongoing. Massey has argued for "an understanding of both place and landscape as *events*, as happenings, as moments that will again be dispersed" (2006: 46 emphasis in original). This dynamic sense of ongoingness is apposite to how places are experienced through bird sounds and the atmospheres that cohere around them. By their very nature these arise, with regularity but not certainty, both *over* time and at *specific* times. The work of Feld is particularly relevant here, not only for his work on the poetics of bird sounds in New Guinea (1990) but in his concept of acoustemology: the way that places are sensed through sound (1996, 2000). My approach here, however, is broader; whilst sound is the focal point, I argue that the contextualisation of sound and the ways it becomes meaningful are normally perceived through a range of other sensory modalities. Sound is thus not isolated as 'the soundscape' (Ingold 2011: 136–139) but is focal to a whole bodily experience. The approach I put forward is not simply acoustemological but is instead an investigation of how the atmospheres of a place are narrated. It is through this multi-sensory experience and process of narration that places come to be felt and understood.

Atmospheres occur in places. Experiencing an atmosphere is an aspect of sensing place, but not exactly the same thing. The distinction is necessarily imprecise and to draw a sharp line between the two would be to misunderstand their relationship. Places are inhabited; they are where life happens and through living they come to be known by their inhabitants. Places *have* atmospheres. These atmospheres, though recurring in some respects, are more ephemeral than the places where they occur. They come and go, shifting sometimes abruptly as weather, activities and light change. As such, part of the distinction between a sense of place and of atmosphere is the temporal duration of what is being experienced. Atmosphere is a way of referring to the ongoingness of places, to those changeable gatherings that are bound up with being somewhere. They emerge through situated relations and need to be understood both in terms of the ecologies of the phenomena encountered and the perceptual and meaning-making practices of those experiencing them.

Atmospheres are neither subjective nor objective (Anderson 2009). They are experienced as external to the self but are also felt in ways that are personal. The gatherings that make atmospheres are not simply generated by a singular observer but are brought together by the myriad mixtures and goings-on of places. Atmospheres are more-than-human and more-than-subjective. They are always, however, felt in ways that may be shared but are also personal. Atmospheres draw together environment and sentiment (Ingold 2015: 79), the cosmic and the affective. Atmospheres emerge through the activities of beings that are inherently perceptual and, thus in turn, the gathering of atmospheres is responsive to what is going on. What is noticed and most strongly felt is personal but is often shared (Anderson 2009: 80). Often there is a focus of activity that draws attention to certain aspects of what is gathered and this also elicits certain feelings. Sounds are atmospheric elements *par excellence*, breathing life into lines of flight and movement (Ingold 2015: 111). Even if they are not a focal point, sounds provide texture to the experience of places. This background texturing can become more apparent in changing circumstances when different sounds are heard, revealing contrasting life lines and mixtures.

The feelings that are elicited through atmospheres are integral to a sense of being. Lou made a distinction between memories of doing and triggers to a sense of being, and this provides a basis for understanding the kinds of memories people have of different times and places and, through those memories, understanding change. I asked Lou to clarify what she had meant by the distinction she drew, and she answered by saying that, for her, memories of doing were quite specific events and activities that were provoked at certain times. A sense of being is less specific but more visceral and more powerful. When she heard the recording of a currawong it suddenly triggered a sense of what it was like to be a child again in Sydney, rather than any specific thing she did as a child. Hearing a sound elicited a sense of how it once gathered together other elements that recurred in her childhood, such as the feeling of her school uniform and the smell of the air. This atmosphere was made fleetingly tangible by the recording and, in turn, an analogous shift in her sense of being emerged.

A sense of being is bound up in feelings that in turn draw upon a sense of what is moral and aesthetic about experiences. The atmosphere of a place is thus implicated in senses of, for example, homeliness or of being alien, as Lou mentions. These feelings are prominent in narratives of listening to birds. In turn, they are influenced by larger narratives that extend the specific experiences outwards. These can include biographical or national narratives, for example. All of these elements can mix together to provide a further sense of whether a place, and one's sense of being in it, is as it should be.

A sense of being is aesthetic and affective. In the case of listening to birds, the senses of being evoked are bound up with relations with nonhuman animals. Two geographers have considered these dimensions of human-animal and human-bird relations, and I take their approaches as a point of articulation for my own.

Ornithophilia and nonhuman charisma

Mark Bonta (2003, 2010) draws on Wilson's concept of biophilia to develop 'ornithophilia' as a means of exploring how and why certain people form an affinity with birds. Jamie Lorimer (2007), meanwhile, has theorised the dimensions of charismatic species: why certain kinds of animal seem to hold a strong appeal and how this appeal is then utilised by conservationists. On the face of it, these two authors are approaching affective human-animal relations from opposite directions: Bonta is drawing attention to the ornithophiliac person whilst Lorimer is considering the charismatic qualities of particular species. To an extent, the apparent opposition in the two approaches is a product of the different foci of each author; Bonta considers birdwatching as an activity that involves people who engage in ongoing relations with place whilst Lorimer explores the political usage of charismatic 'flagship' species within conservation. Though their emphases differ, both accounts draw humans and animals together in an experiential process and event.

Bonta's investigation of ornithophilia emphasises birding as an attunement of the senses that layers significance into encounters entangling birders with the avian landscape. Those who become 'infected' with ornithophilia (2010: 142) are thus drawn into the temporal rhythms of birds and the places they inhabit. But despite this entanglement of people, birds and landscape, Bonta argues that "The aesthetics in birding involves the experience of beauty (the sublime) *inherent* in the colours, flight, songs, calls, and other, less often noted characteristics of the avifauna" (ibid: 149 my emphasis). From Bonta's own account there is clearly more to the aesthetics of birding as an activity than this, although birders are rather adept at perceiving birds as objects with inherent qualities and can sometimes, as Bonta points out, be indifferent to the sometimes unseemly locations where they go birding. My own interest is less on the highly focussed engagement of birders but on narratives of listening to birds in more everyday settings. It concerns how bird sounds become important to the experience of atmosphere and how these experiences are reflected upon. As such the aesthetics that are invoked are *emergent* from the relations of encounter rather than inherent in objects of observation.

Turning to Lorimer, he defines nonhuman charisma as, "the distinguishing properties of a nonhuman entity or process that determine its perception by humans and its subsequent evaluation" (2007: 915). Charisma is thus relational; it is not so much inherent in a nonhuman as emergent in its perception by humans, with their own sensory particularities. Where Lorimer's approach is lacking is that he focuses on charisma as emergent in the human perception of the nonhuman animal *in itself*. What this leaves out is the *situatedness* of the encounter and the bearing this has on its 'subsequent evaluation' by humans. He ignores the atmospheric gathering together of elements that, for example, a bird sound is embedded within and, in turn, draws attention to. Instead, the affective taxonomy that Lorimer outlines is focused on the bodily qualities of nonhumans and on the perceptual capacities of humans to discern those qualities, particularly visually, and their subsequent emotional responses.

This, I argue, is too narrowly-focused an approach to understand the appeal of engagement with nonhumans and the places they are bound up with. Indeed, Lorimer introduces his article by discussing Craig, a conservationist who surveys corncrakes in the Hebrides. What Craig finds appealing is not so much 'the corncrake' or even its rasping and repetitive call, but "the crake-filled summer nights out on the islands" (2007: 911). It is thus the situated and broadly-encompassing atmosphere that is brought into focus by the sound of the corncrake that is charismatic and not simply a more narrowly-defined engagement of human and bird bodies. My approach to the feelings and aesthetics described in the narratives below is that they are elicited through their incorporation into ongoing atmospheres that listeners experience as they go about their lives. They are as much about the experience of a shared world as they are about encounters with specific other beings.

Blackbirds, home and noticing bird sounds

Whilst I have never calculated which bird is most frequently mentioned by respondents, I suspect that, were I to do so, it would be the blackbird. Here is a typical account:

> [I love the song of the] blackbird especially at dusk on a sultry evening after a hot sunny day. When everything is still. No wind. Very warm. About 10 p.m. at night, still light and reminds me of being little again.
>
> (Barbara Adams, Darlington).

In this account, and numerous others, the mellifluous, relaxed song of the blackbird is associated with certain conditions and times of day. The warmth and calmness of the blackbird song becomes focal to the sultry atmosphere of spring and summer evenings, mixing with the scent of garden flowers and the light gradually fading into dusk. It is almost as if the song gives off its own kind of warmth. As one respondent succinctly puts it:

> Blackbird – long warm evenings. Time to get the deckchair out.

Blackbirds also make other evocative sounds, particularly the insistent pinking call given at dusk as they congregate for their wintertime roost. Though less musical or beautiful than the song, this sound was often described as characteristic of a wintery atmosphere, just as the short winter days move into the cold darkness of evening. Blackbirds, by various means, are adept at making themselves heard and at drawing attention to their own place-making activities and in doing so they make many British people feel at home too. Indeed, some respondents even suggested that the blackbird's song is quintessentially British. But what is it about hearing a blackbird that makes people feel this way? To begin to address this question, I introduce some general points about listening to birds and the characteristics of the narratives I discuss.

The first general point is that bird sounds are important to people because of their very presence. Birds live amongst people in and around homes and gardens, in city centres and parks and in any number of rural locations. They are usually present throughout the year but, while this means that birds can be encountered in an everyday sense, their presence is not static and constant but changes with time and season (Whitehouse 2017). The dynamic presence of birds and the ways this presence entangles with people's lives, the changes, constancies and rhythms within it, is essential to making them significant and integral to ongoing atmospheric mixtures. They are important because they are there.

But how is this presence revealed? Of course one can see birds, sometimes easily, but many take more of an effort to see and to do so clearly and in a way that enables identification by sight often requires the aid of a pair of binoculars. Hearing, on the other hand, only requires that one listens. The ease with which the presence and identity of birds is revealed through sound is crucial to their significance in many people's lives. This means that listening to birds can readily be incorporated into many activities that take place within earshot of their sound-making. People hear birds when they are at home, in their garden, travelling to work and in bed at night. This is not to dismiss the enormous significance of seeing birds, but hearing birds is often one of the most straightforward and prevalent ways in which nonhuman animals come to be perceived. The atmospheres of bird sounds are ubiquitous and can even transcend the boundary between outdoors and indoors.

The prominence of listening and, most importantly, the atmospheric qualities and *situatedness* of bird sounds are highly significant to many respondents. Though this might seem obvious, it is something frequently overlooked in approaches that attempt to understand the aesthetics of bird sounds. In 1973 the philosopher and ornithologist Charles Hartshorne wrote *Born to sing: an interpretation and world survey of bird song*. The aim of this book was to apply musicological principles to bird song and to explore, as Hartshorne put it, "the possible scientific uses of the aesthetic analogy between … birds, and man with respect to music" (1973: 4). Hartshorne's survey was an ambitious attempt to reach beyond the subjective and survey the deeper musical structures of bird song. The songs of a huge range of species were systematically graded using various structural aspects such as repetitiveness and variety, so that in the most beautiful songs an optimum level of complexity is attained (1973: 8–9).

For Hartshorne, however, the beauty of the song must be assessed in isolation from the experience of listening to it; it needs to be severed from the atmospheric mixtures through which it emerges. Through disentangling oneself from the circumstances of listening, the sound in and of itself can be systematically analysed in comparison to others. The gathering brought into focus by sound is shorn away through analysis to reveal an object but not an atmosphere. This is not the way that bird sounds are really encountered or why they become evocative, affecting or beautiful to people.

Hartshorne is not alone in this objectifying analysis of song. Most scientific writing about bird sounds attempts to objectify the sound-making into ‘the song’ or ‘the call’ rather than to conceptualise bird sounds as ongoing threads of communication occurring concurrently with other activities and processes. This rather specialised form of classificatory analysis seems far removed from how most people, and very probably birds themselves, listen to sounds and seems unhelpful when considering the sorts of narratives discussed herein. In fact, although respondents often describe the sounds of birds as aesthetically pleasing as sounds, they sometimes find sounds that they describe as unpleasant to be equally evocative, meaningful and atmospheric. It is not a systematic, or even unconscious, judgement of the beauty of the song that influences the sorts of bird sounds that people find meaningful or moving. Instead, it is the atmospheric circumstances of listening to birds with which people share their lives and world that is pre-eminent; the ‘beauty’ of listening to birds emerges through its ongoing experiencing and not from contemplating an isolated object.

These narratives, I suggest, can be more fully reflected and understood through a focus on an aesthetics that is perceptual, situated and experiential and that takes as its first principle the co-presence of humans and birds in a shared world. This approach draws on Bateson’s definition of aesthetics as “responsive to *the pattern that connects*” (1979: 8 emphasis in original). It follows from this that an aesthetic question is one that considers the connections between one organism and another and also the situatedness that gathers them into a shared, atmospheric world. It is these sorts of perceptual engagements and what people make of them that are central to an experiential aesthetics.

A further point arising from the narratives is that listening to birds is a whole bodily experience of place in which the sound is the focal point. Sounds are described together with smells, sights and the relative movement of air, as in this example:

We used to live in Hampshire and had a large mimosa tree just outside our bedroom window. It would come into its glorious yellow bloom in March. At dawn, a robin habitually sang from this tree. The mimosa’s sweet perfume and the robin’s melodious song would drift through the bedroom window and one felt an overwhelming feeling of peace – that all was well in the world.

(John Wolstenholme, London)

Here the senses are aesthetically drawn together in a memory of situated, atmospheric experience. The robin's singing is made more powerful by the colour and scent of the mimosa blooms, as well as the time of day and season. The activities of birds resonate (cf. Ingold 2000: 196; Wikan 1992: 463) with the rhythms of time and season to create an evocative atmosphere. Following from this understanding, many respondents expressed feelings of well-being in response to hearing birds and this seems most apparent when people's lives also resonate with these rhythms, a sense that comes from a sympathetic attention to the activities of other beings around us. Much as musicians in an orchestra attend to one another as they engage in their playing, people attend to birds within the current of their everyday activities. This attendance is bound up with atmosphere; a resonance between listener, bird and other aspects of their shared world evokes a sense of time and place but also other feelings, such as the peacefulness mentioned in the above example. Atmospheres gather together this mixture of elements in ways that evoke many different feelings, and listening to birds intensifies the experience more acutely. Listening to the commonplace, ongoing sounds of blackbirds and robins is not simply a case of hearing musical notes and tones; it is an experience that draws attention to the gathering of varied elements in a shared world that is both dynamic and recurrent.

Experiencing change in Britain and Australia

When I quoted my respondent Lou earlier she mentioned that a change in circumstances can reveal aspects of the everyday experience of place that were once barely noticed. This is particularly important because it demonstrates that normally peripheral experiences are not insignificant; not being conscious of some aspect of one's surroundings is not necessarily the same as indifference. Atmospheres lurk in the background of perception much of the time, but they still exert a powerful influence. Large-scale movement is not essential for people to notice changes in the birds they hear. Even over short periods of time, the landscape and birds in a single area can alter quite dramatically. Sometimes home can come to seem less homely through such changes. One respondent described how a new home needed to be found for him to feel at home:

I moved to France from the UK three years ago and one of the benefits has been the rediscovery … ~~-~~of birds and their wonderful calls – unfortunately all too rare in an over-congested UK~~. . .~~. . . . It's the call of the skylark that really brings back memories of very hot summer days as a young child wandering with friends across parched ploughed fields in East Anglia, the sun beating down and the incessant twittering from on high of the skylark and more often than not I could never find the bird in the sky. Today, to walk out of my own front door and hear the sound of the skylark as I work is without doubt one of my greatest pleasures.

(Trevor Aylett, Abilly)

Here, learning to live in a new home provides a link with past experiences that are unattainable in a changed homeland. Many other respondents have moved between Britain and Australia, and their stories are often founded on stark differences in the sounds of birds, as this example illustrates:

We have been here in Sydney, Australia for just over six months and soon discovered that, to the British ear, the Australian birdsong is really quite disruptive. We have heard of people emigrating *back* to the UK because of the 'ugly' birdsong here. In a nutshell I would describe the subconscious effect of 'birdsong' here as being to raise people's tension. It is a series of screeches or other worldly sounds. In the UK you wake to the blackbird, sparrow, or if you are lucky thrush, gentle, harmonious songs that usher in the day to come. Here the birds literally crash into your consciousness~~. . .~~ . . . I honestly believe that if you hooked somebody up and exposed them to British birdsong and then Sydney birdsong you would see the latter send the pulse racing.

(Eugen Beer, Sydney)

This example is more extreme than most, and in some cases people moving from Britain to Australia have been excited by the new and exotic sounds they encounter. Here the perhaps strange idea of 'British' and 'Australian' birdsong is put forward as a contrast to which the 'British ear', attuned to the harmonious native sounds of home, is suddenly disrupted by the dissonance of Australian birds. These contrasts seem to emphasise an analogy between nation and fauna in ways that imply a kind of avian ethnicity. People may speak English, but the birds ensure that the two places sound and feel very different. It also emphasises the point that the atmosphere feels a certain way not just because of what is happening there but how it is experienced. Australia and its birds generate contrasting atmospheres if one is attuned to Britain and its birds. Perhaps over time this dissonance can be alleviated through re-attunement, as happened in Lou's experience.

The differences are not absolute though. There are blackbirds in Australia, and hearing them in a land to which they have been introduced provokes interesting responses:

> As an Australian living in London, bird song contributes strongly to my sense of place. I have recordings of some Australian birds in my iTunes collection that I listen to sometimes to remind me of home: cockatoos, whipbirds, currawongs and bellbirds are particularly evocative for me. … But I also have some British birds that I like in my collection, particularly the blackbird and the stonechat. I love the fact that the blackbird's call is often in the background in many different parts of the UK, so I associate it strongly with living here, and have gotten quite disoriented in Melbourne in Australia where blackbirds also live.
>
> (Adam Schembri, London)

19th-century settlers to the antipodes must have missed those sounds from the old country, and there were many attempts to establish birds from home and elsewhere. This means that some modern Australian cities have a cosmopolitan avifauna, as described in this account:

> When I was young, the birds I mostly heard around my home in Melbourne, Australia, were introduced species: common blackbirds, house sparrows, common mynahs, spotted turtle-doves and common starlings, but also native red wattlebirds and silvereyes. The sound of them has always brought back memories of those times. Now that I watch birds, the sound of those introduced pests annoys me. I can't hear the 'proper' birds over their din. Yet they still bring back fond memories.
>
> (Anonymous, Altona)

Here the sense that a place is not quite as should be emerges: the birds that are there are the wrong birds, in some cases. Species brought over by settlers at least in part to create an atmosphere of home that would aid in their own acclimatisation now make some native Australians feel less comfortable (Franklin 2006). Sometimes, an atmosphere evokes the guilt of colonialism and the ecological damage wrought by it. People's perception of atmospheres is not simply direct but is also influenced by broader narratives and ideas that shape how they are felt and known.

These narratives of life change and memory reveal idealisations of how everyday life should be experienced and sensed; they are thus about an aesthetics of experience. Changes through life may be adjusted to but the sounds that disappear or are lost can still be missed. But what seems most significant is that changes in the birds that people hear reveal something of what is personal and significant to their own lives and the worlds within which they emerge. Belonging to a place has long been understood as an interactive process (Barth 1969; Cohen 1987), but these narratives exemplify how the interactions through which people belong are with many aspects of the environment and emerge through varied sensory experiences. The more-than-human atmospheres that are noticed through changing circumstances shape the ways experience is judged and understood and the ways in which one's sense of being in a place is felt. Whether the atmosphere seems homely or alienating emerges *in-between* the ongoing, multi-sensory experience of the world and the personal or historical narratives these experiences recall and elicit (cf. Anderson 2009: 78; Bille 2015: 268).

Birds and home in New Zealand

The very different sounding avifaunas of Australia and Britain can generate atmospheres of both excitement and alienation for those that move between the two countries. But for those that travel from Britain to New Zealand, the experience is more complex still, and in reading the accounts of respondents one could be forgiven for thinking they are writing about entirely different places. There are some who are struck by how different the birds of New Zealand sound; others who are delighted to find the same birds that they knew from the homeland; some who are amazed at the profusion of bird song, whilst others who are perturbed by the beautiful but eerily silent native forests. It is no surprise that one encounters this variety of experiences of listening to birds in New Zealand when one considers the ecological isolation of the islands together with the relatively recent human history, in which the avifauna has become quite strikingly entangled.

Ecological histories of New Zealand, (e.g. Wilson 2004; Young 2004), posit three waves of extinctions since humans first visited around 2000 years ago, leaving *kiore* or Pacific rats behind, which predated on birds' eggs. The second wave began with Polynesian colonisation and the third with European arrival in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Europeans brought with them a wide range of species from their homeland. The temperate climate and the rapid Europeanisation of much of the landscape enabled many species, including songbirds such as blackbirds, song thrushes and skylarks, to establish themselves with great success. The highly distinctive native avifauna fared much less well, particularly in the wake of the arrival of ground predators, such as rats, stoats and possums. The New Zealand avifauna of the 21st century is thus distinctly heterogenous in origins, and any discussion of it, either by biologists or by my respondents, is bound up in talk of origins, of native, introduced and naturalised species. Violent, colonial narratives are routinely a part of the experience of more-than-human atmospheres in New Zealand.

The New Zealand of the late 18th century was a very different place to Britain though. Perhaps the first European to be struck by and to narrate their encounter with birds was Joseph Banks, the naturalist on James Cook's expeditions. In 1770 Cook's ship, *The Endeavour*, was anchored at Ship Cove in Queen Charlotte Sound, from where Banks wrote the following:

> This morn, I was awakened by the singing of the birds ashore from whence we are distant not a quarter of a mile, the numbers of them were certainly very great who seemed to strain their throat with emulation perhaps; their voices were certainly the most melodious wild music I have ever heard, almost imitating small bells but with the most tuneable silver sound imaginable to which maybe the distance was no small addition.

The atmosphere that Banks was sensing emerged through the sound of bellbirds, and it is still possible to hear a profusion of these around Ship Cove, and more particularly on nearby Motuara Island, a predator-free sanctuary managed by the New Zealand Department of Conservation. Since the acclimatisation societies introduced numerous species of bird, plant, fish and animal in the late 19th century, native birds have been in retreat and now some are only found on island sanctuaries such as Motuara and Tiritiri Matangi. This has meant that in many parts of New Zealand one mostly hears introduced European birds. Hearing native birds is a less-than-everyday experience for most 'Kiwis', who obviously relate to their native birdlife in conspicuous ways. Those that are heard most frequently, such as tuis, fantails and grey warblers, are those mentioned most often by New Zealand respondents. For those coming to live in New Zealand from the UK however, the introduced birds are comforting and the native birds are sometimes fascinating and sometimes strange. One respondent who moved from Scotland to Tauranga writes:

> It is very pleasing to me to hear the blackbirds singing in New Zealand. I am not aware of whether they are native or introduced, even so I love them. … There are also skylarks in the park close to our new home and they are reminiscent of spring/summer days back in what used to be a warm west of Scotland, flying up high and singing their little hearts out then plummeting to the ground again.

Here the sounds evoke an atmosphere that draws together different places and different biographical points in the respondent's life. The sense of being in Scotland and New Zealand is drawn closer, but sometimes this sort of connection is missing. New Zealanders in Britain write of missing the sound of tuis or fantails, whilst one respondent who moved from the English Midlands to Dunedin writes:

> I moved from Northamptonshire to New Zealand when I was eleven. There were many things I expected to miss when I came to New Zealand – friends, winter Christmases, familiar television programmes, and the like – but the most evocative single thing I have missed in the years since is the cawing of crows at twilight. The birds here in New Zealand have their own sounds – even species I know from Britain, like blackbirds, sound different here. … But there are no crows here, and the sound of crows still makes me homesick. There's one particular song, "Senses Working Overtime" by the band XTC, which ends in the sound of crows cawing. It always reminds me of childhood in a south Midlands village in the 1970s.

Here the atmosphere evoked by the recording is missed in a way that seems to reflect an uneasy sense of being in the new land. A narrative of movement draws attention to gaps in what is experienced that are related back to how it is assessed and felt. In Bille's terms there is a merging of 'the atmosphere that *is* and *should* be' (2015: 269 emphasis in original). In New Zealand a problem for some seems to be that other kinds of birds are missing from daily life: the native birds that have become restricted to island sanctuaries and remote areas of forest. Recently there have been a number of attempts to create 'island sanctuaries' on the mainland, of which the Zealandia sanctuary in central Wellington is perhaps best known. Surrounded by predator-proof fences, these bring the sounds of native birds into the city. Reintroduction campaigns are described in terms of 'bringing birds home', as if they were in exile on offshore islands, and gardeners are encouraged to plant native flowering shrubs to encourage the tui 'back home' and into their gardens. By bringing birds home and filling in the gaps in experience that are widely noticed, it seems they are also being incorporated in the process of fostering a homelier atmosphere for New Zealanders too.

Listening to birds and perceiving atmospheres

I began by raising the question of how hearing birds contributes to people's sense of place, or their place-making. My argument has implied that bird sounds are not just integral to a sense of place but to a sense of being, or that sense of being a particular person in a particular time and place. Who one is and where one is sometimes come to seem like the same experience (Bender 2001: 13). Birds, too, seem to be doing the same thing through their sound-making. They sing to establish relations with other birds and to make and mark out a home. They call together when they go to roost for the same reasons, and in doing all of this they come to people's attention as part of their own place-making. These processes of sound-making and place-making that in turn shape a sense of being are inherently atmospheric; they are ongoing mixtures of elements that are both physical and felt.

To humans, the sounds of birds are indexical of times and places. Birds are encouraged to sing by certain sorts of conditions, of light, weather, habitat and by other sounds that go on around them. Their sounds are understood to emerge because of time and place and are in themselves intended to further those relations. The experience of listening to birds thus represents certain kinds of relations, sometimes of difference and sometimes of continuity. It is these sorts of ongoing, atmospheric relations through which senses of both place and being emerge and through which people are situated. As Lou put it to me:

> The natural world is not a tableau of scenery – it is a living, rustling, humming, singing thing which we stand in the middle of.

This captures the experience of more-than-human atmospheres that emerge through listening to birds. Atmospheres are not easily reducible to imagination or feeling, to a sense of place and time, or to the purely external and material qualities of the world. All of those are bound up in atmospheres but atmospheres have a distinct ontological status from any of those phenomena. They are not simply imagined but emerge from a complex meshwork of interactions involving many living beings going about their lives (Ingold 2011). Atmospheres are thus also fluctuating and emergent; they are unfolding events rather than static objects (cf. Anderson 2009). They are never quite the same from moment to moment, even though regularities can still be sensed and related to memories of places and times. When birds are singing, their actions are bound up with the sounds of all those around them, with the acoustic conditions and with the growth and movements of other beings. Their singing is influenced by the prevailing seasons, weather conditions and changing light, as well as to other sounds in their environment. The atmospheres to which their singing contributes gather together all these elements.

As Lou points out, we stand in the middle of this atmospheric world. The atmosphere that we experience comes about not simply through what is external to us but also through our bodily capacities to perceive. An atmosphere in part is what we are sensitive to. Atmospheres are also inherently meaningful, but these meanings have certain specific qualities. Atmospheres are primarily felt, and this initial tacit and inarticulate feeling is essential to their semiotic power. Atmospheres can be reflected upon, as they are in the narratives discussed here, and this reflection can influence the ways they are subsequently sensed, but that reflection follows from those initial, often tantalising feelings. Atmospheres cannot entirely be captured in conscious reflection but those feelings can be evoked in the sort of 'Proustian rush' that Lou describes in her narrative at the beginning of this chapter and that others also convey. Atmospheric reality has a prominence and power that draws listeners out into the world by triggering intense but inarticulate feelings. This initial sensation is not the end of one's encounter but elicits further reflection on one's sense of being in the world and to the other beings within it.

Notes

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[2] Focussing on the themes of birds, their sounds, senses of place and atmosphere aligns this paper with two areas of theoretical discussion: the sensing and experience of places in terms of their atmosphere and the emergence of relations between humans, animals and other nonhumans. Recent work in both geography (e.g. Cloke and Jones 2002; Massey 2006) and anthropology (e.g. Bender 2001; Feld 1996; Ingold 2000, 2011) has productively attempted to draw both areas together.