

James Weeks

Birdwatching

for voices, or instruments, or voices and instruments

2025

Select a place where there are birds, or where birds are likely to pass during the time of the performance. Spread out in the space.

Prepare by immersing yourself in the sound environment; with eyes closed, focusing on each sound in turn and gradually immersing yourself within their polyphony (see Polyphonic Listening). Continue until you feel calm, focused and attentive, then open your eyes.

The aim is to count the birds you see, as you see them, like a bird census. For each individual bird you see, make a sound:

- for **birds not in flight**, a single, staccato note. The pitch of this note should reflect the location of the bird: if on the ground, a low note in the gamut; if high in a tree, a high note, etc.
- for **birds in flight**, a longer tone, held for as long as you follow their flight with your gaze. This tone should rise or fall in accordance with the bird's flight pattern, so you are tracing its flight in pitch.

The ideal gamut is from middle C (C4) upwards (as far as your voice or instrument will go). Male voices should ideally sing in falsetto to achieve this, but if this is not possible, using the octave below middle C (from C3) as well is permissible.

Select pitches intuitively. Repeated pitches are allowed, as is restricting yourself to just a few different pitches, but avoid creating audible patterns.

- Try not to count birds twice.
- If the number of birds in view is uncountable, perform a reasonable estimate.
- If you see a flock in flight, perform a succession of short pitches, one for each bird, *legato* (in one breath).

Choice of phoneme is free. Dynamics are free.

Finish the piece when you want.

This piece can be performed by any number of voices and/or instruments, from one to many.

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