

Mp3 John Neville - Bird Songs Of The Scottish Highlands And Islands

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2CD's Beautifully crafted natural sounds of the birds of the Scottish Highlands and Islands--Listen to some excerpts. 143 MP3 Songs NEW AGE: Nature, SPOKEN WORD: Instructional Details: Review from Wildlife Sound The Journal of the Wildlife Sound Recording Society Volume 11 No 1 Spring 2007 BIRD SONGS OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS and ISLANDS A double audio CD album from John Neville; cover painting by Robert Bateman ISBN 0-9781797-1-4 Available from neville-recording.com John Neville released his first CD in 1994 and is now a seasoned publisher. The Neville Recording label is well established and this latest album is their eleventh title; the list includes one book, reviewed in a previous Journal issue. However, it is not exactly business as usual, and this album marks a new departure. Most of John's previous work was recorded in Western Canada, but in spring 2005, the team crossed a few time zones for their annual expedition and toured Scotland. Although I am anglicised, Scotland just happens to be my native land and I was quite nostalgic as I listened to John introducing the tracks. I know the birds and the locations from previous visits, so I can write these notes with some confidence. This ambitious album is not short on content, covering most of the Scottish breeding birds and winter visitors. The numerous tracks feature all the important species and our favourite songsters. Obviously, it would take a lifetime to record them all successfully and a veritable mission impossible for a visitor on a short tour. Accordingly John enlisted the help of British recordists, to do justice to his title, and naturally he turned to WSRS members for the requisite recordings; our esprit de corps lives on! Our Journal Editor, Simon Elliott contributed the most, and other WSRS members listed in the credits include Derek McGinn, Chris Watson and Kyle Turner. I think they can all be correctly described as celebrity guest recordists, and in recognition of their achievements: This CD is dedicated to Robert Bateman and Simon Elliott. Both have contributed enormously to our understanding and appreciation of ornithology. John sticks to his customary format, using voiceovers to introduce the tracks and I do find this approach more user-friendly than trying to follow a printed track list. The announcements are short vignettes of the subjects, read by John in his inimitable style and the balance between the parts is about right. Most tracks are dual mono

format and a few sound like reflector stereo. The audio quality is good throughout with the local people supplying the difficult recordings and I am not exaggerating when I write that many of the featured clips are the best available anywhere. Now as we all know, Scotland is no pastoral idyll; it lies in the path of the North Atlantic weather systems and is notorious for changeable conditions. Accordingly, we hear plenty of convincing backgrounds of roaring surf, sea wash, running water and wind for that authentic room tone, doubtless tamed in the studio by Traz Damji, the sound engineer. I was defeated by the elements on my last visit and I recollect a boyhood holiday in the Hebrides when the cups blew off the anemometer! The numerous tracks present quite an assortment of subjects. All the common species are covered, as you would expect, and just because they are common does not mean they are unimportant. I never tire of hearing good recordings of our favourite waders on their breeding grounds; birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe and Golden Plover are always good value and their exciting sounds are evocative of the moors and uplands. Like any other location, Scotland hosts its specialities and for obvious reasons, most of the challenging recordings were supplied by the WSRS members already named. Nevertheless, John made many fine recordings himself and I can mention his Barn Owls on Islay and the Wheatear singing at Durness. The grating Ptarmigan was particularly good, and other notables include both breeding divers, Snipe, Arctic Terns, Fulmar and Long-tailed Duck, known as Old Squaw in North America. Readers will know that Simon Elliott specialises in recording raptors at the nest and his close miking technique delivers unrivalled audio quality, not to mention new material for the science of bio-acoustics. Good marks for both technical merit and artistic impression! Raptor species from Simon in this album include Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Golden Eagle and Osprey, plus a couple of owls. Incidentally, I have not personally heard Short-eared Owls, live on their breeding ground and I particularly liked the females husky, barking call on CD#2, Track 6. Of course, Simon is an all-rounder and not limited to raptors and contributed many of the other connoisseurs recordings, too numerous to mention individually. Local knowledge is useful and Scotland is the happy hunting ground of Derek McGinn, who is resident in the Highlands. During a lengthy career, he has been able to take advantage of good conditions and exploit the recording potential of the region. He has tracked down the elusive species and supplied many of the trophy recordings from the remote sites. He contributed samples of Dotterel and Snow Bunting on the high tops and seabirds such as Gannets and Manx Shearwaters on their inaccessible island colonies. I enjoyed his rookooing Black Grouse at lek, and the bubbling chorus was all

the better for being in stereo. Chris Watson weighed in with rare recordings of Razorbill, Hen Harrier and White-tailed Eagle, while Kyle Turner supplied the Vixen cubs plus the Pheasant roost; all handpicked samples of seriously good quality. We generally agree that routine wildlife recordings are a bit light on bass. Our parabolas colour the sound by acting as de facto frequency filters and further south, we feel obliged to filter our raw material to neutralise Home Counties static and traffic roar. So it made a refreshing change to hear the roar of the surf and some interesting sounds in the lower register. My trusty headphones do not generate a heavy bass response, but they are more revealing than speakers and I enjoyed tracks such as the Rock Dove (LE), Cuckoo (JN), Shag (SE), Razorbills (CW), Gannets (DmcG) and the sonorous roaring of Red Deer (SE). Presumably, not the audiophiles choice, but I thought Johns Fulmars on Handa were good guttural low frequency sounds, set against a convincing sea. We are familiar with recordings of the noisy Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* and indeed this species is a regular target for our microphones. Conversely, we seldom hear the Common (Harbour) Seal *Phoca vitulina*, one of the quieter Pinnipeds. Admittedly, Johns sample, recorded at Port Ellen, will not impress the music lovers among us, but it will please the naturalists and I was certainly interested to hear it. The atmospheric whistling of the drake Wigeon is an exciting wild sound and is justifiably a popular subject, but does the example illustrate true duetting? Listening to Simons recording on CD#2 Track 76, it does seem that the timing of the drakes glissando whistle is synchronised with the preceding purring note from the female. I know of other British species that seem to synchronise in this way including the Long-eared Owl and Chaffinch, but that is another story. Territorial song is one aspect of our interest, but soundscapes change with the seasons and how very different birds sound en masse! We hear the cacophony from the great seabird colonies and the flocks of wildfowl and waders that animate the winter scene. Novice naturalists will learn to identify these sounds, while old hands are transported to all those wild and exciting locations. Magic! Congratulations are in order for another successful publication. Clearly, a lot of work has gone into this ambitious new title, which maintains Johns usual high standard. It will certainly enhance the good reputation of Neville Recording. The album has an intrinsic educational value, being both informative and entertaining. It offers more than routine documentary recordings and enthusiasts will be pleased with the quality of the rare samples. I was quite nostalgic as I listened, reminded of past adventures in wild and remote places. So, whatever next? More globetrotting or perhaps another book? Clearly, John is a natural raconteur and I would encourage him to continue recording and

writing. Either way, we can be sure that he will not rest on his laurels and there will be more to come from Neville Recording. Keep up the good work! Gordon Edgar Searches:single pinkfooted goose mp3

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